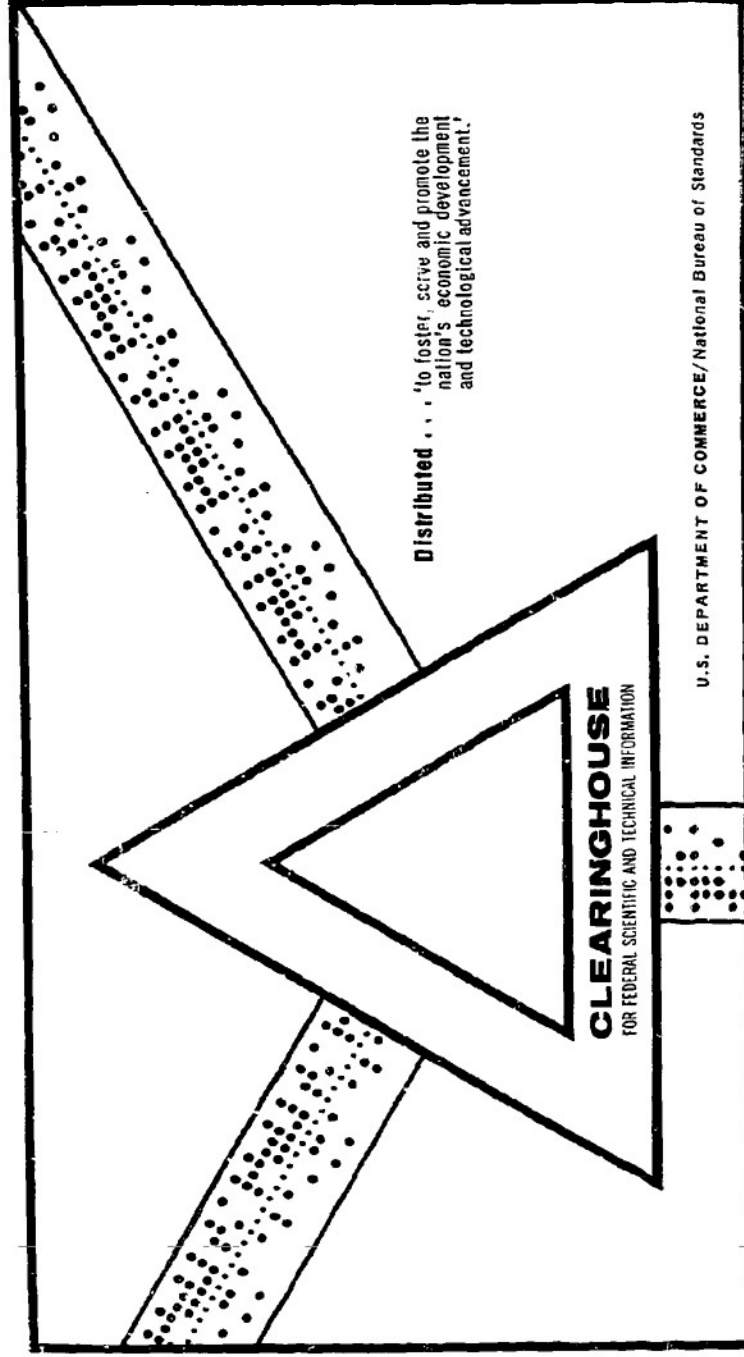


PARACHUTISTS - AIRBORNE LANDING

I. I. Lisov

Army Foreign Science and Technology Center
Washington, D. C.

10 December 1969



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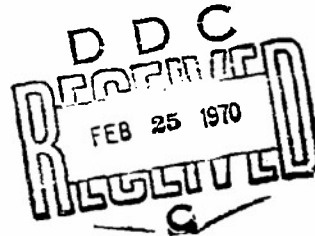


PARACHUTISTS - AIRBORNE LANDING

by

Lt. Gen. I. I. Lisov

Country: USSR



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FOREWORD

I dedicate this book to my comrades in arms, the airborne parachutists, living and dead, with deep love and esteem.

In recent years numerous operational-tactical sketches and military-historical works have been published on many operations of the Great Patriotic War conducted on land, on sea and in the air. It is unfortunate, however, that the heroic deeds of Soviet airborne parachutists have not been sufficiently publicized.

During the Great Patriotic War the airborne parachutists underwent all ordeals in a worthy manner and earned combat authority and respect both among the commanders and among the troops of the other combat arms. Over 500,000 parachutists took part in combat in the various sectors of the Soviet-German Front. Almost all received orders and medals, and 130 of the best received the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The secret of the success of the airborne troops in combined-arms ground combat lay not only in their parachute training, which developed in them a strong will. It also did not depend on any kind of special equipment or methods of tactical training and control, for many went into combat without having made a parachute jump.

If Soviet parachutists won love and respect in the past war it was thanks to their high moral and combat qualities and their supreme devotion to the Communist Party and the Soviet Motherland. The Party and the Soviet people displayed continuous concern for the airborne troops. During the Great Patriotic War each newly formed airborne formation was awarded the "Guards" title and was given a Guards combat banner even before it moved into the area of combat operations. Particular concern was given to feeding, arming and outfitting the parachutists and to their combat and political training.

Now in peacetime it is very important to preserve the high state of training and the combat traditions of our airborne troops, since in a future

war, if one be unleashed by the imperialists, these troops will play a more important role than was the case in the Great Patriotic War. With their exceptionally high air and ground mobility, these troops can always enter into combat at a time and place which the enemy least expects. The airborne troops continue to maintain and perfect these qualities in peacetime training.

In noting the great services of the airborne troops during the past war we must tell of those generals and officers who were the first to break new trails into the field of Soviet military art which was unknown but full of great promise -- the application of airborne landings. Brought up by the Communist Party, they did much to create and prepare airborne units and large units for accomplishing any combat missions.

Among these pioneers and veteran parachutists is their first commander, twice Hero of Soviet Union V. A. Glazunov; former Secretary of the VLKSM [Vsesoyuznyy Leninskiy Kommunisticheskoy Soyuz Molodezhi; All-Union Leninist Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol)] Central Committee Lt Gen G. P. Gromov and Col Gen Ye. V. Ivanov, both Members of the Military Council; commanders of large airborne units Gens I. S. Bezuglyy, K. N. Vindushev, I. I. Gubarevich, S. S. Gur'yev, V. A. Glazkov, M. I. Denisenko, V. G. Zholudev, I. I. Zatevakhin, A. F. Kazankin, I. N. Konev, I. I. Kuryshchev, A. F. Levashev, A. A. Onufriyev, A. I. Rodimtsev, M. F. Tikhonov and A. I. Utvenko, Col S. N. Kireyev and many others.

Much was done for the specialized training of airborne soldiers by the following officers, who received the titles of masters and honored masters of sport of the USSR: Nabi Amintayev, S. N. Afanas'yev, V. G. Baranov, A. A. Belousov, P. P. Balashov, I. K. Brushko, V. S. Veselov, P. I. Grokhovskiy, N. A. Yevdokimov, V. N. Yevseyev, M. G. Zabelin, A. I. Zigayev, K. F. Kaytanov, N. M. Lisichkin, A. N. Lukin, L. G. Minov, Ya. D. Moshkovskiy, N. A. Ostryakov, V. I. Nekhroshev, B. N. Petrov, I. G. Starchak, P. P. Polosukhin, P. S. Tikhonov, N. A. Polezhay, A. M. Foteyev, V. I. Kharakhonov, V. A. Shekker; by State Prize laureates and honored inventors of the RSFSR, the brothers Nikolay, Vladimir and Anatoliy Doronin; and by test parachutists and Heroes of the Soviet Union Cols P. I. Dolgov and V. G. Romanyuk and Lt Col Ye. N. Andreyev.

Many are no longer among the living, but their fond memory still lives today among personnel of the airborne troops. The author has had occasion to serve with or meet many of the airborne generals and officers, while some of them were his tutors.

The book contains not only the author's personal recollections and observations, but also his own training and combat experience as an airborne officer who first made a parachute jump in 1934 and who since that time has devoted his life to service "under the parachute's canopy." The recollections of many of the author's comrades in arms are expressed in the book. The author is particularly thankful for the help given him in working on the book by USSR Masters of Sport L. G. Minov and A. A. Belousov and Candidate of Historical Sciences M. D. Rabinovich.

The author does not pretend to have made a full generalization of the cases of combat employment of Soviet airborne troops at all stages of the past war.

The goal of this book is to acquaint a wide range of readers with the history of development and the heroic actions of the Soviet airborne troops during the Great Patriotic War, and to tell about the main airborne landing operations of the Soviet Army, of the courage and heroism of the airborne soldiers and of their valorous fulfillment of their military obligation.

In addition, on the basis of the experience of the past war the author makes certain conclusions from the combat employment of airborne landings under present conditions, taking account of the postwar changes in organization, weaponry and combat equipment of airborne troops and military transport aviation.

Chapter I

WE WERE FIRST

Opposing sides have always striven to penetrate into the enemy rear by various methods and learn his plans and intentions, his forces and capabilities and concentration areas or axes of movement. Under favorable circumstances scouts have not only obtained the necessary information, but have also destroyed important rear area objectives and spread panic. They thus undermined the morale of troops and populace, created a lack of confidence in their abilities and caused exaggerated estimates of enemy strength.

The means and methods of penetrating the enemy rear have changed with time (new means permitted this to be accomplished by a more sophisticated method), but the goal of the actions remained almost unchanged. For example on 10 May 1940 military transport aircraft and parachutes made it possible for the Germans to land several thousand well-armed elite airborne paratroopers behind the lines of the Dutch and Belgians in a short time. The Dutch and Belgian fortresses were opened from within and, supported by numerous combat aircraft, the Hitlerite armored troops rushed across the bridges and crossings seized by the paratroopers and moved into Holland and Belgium. As a result of simultaneous blows from the front and rear, the armies of these countries were forced to capitulate in several days without having really made use of their fully combat-ready units to repulse the enemy.

The first employment of aircraft as a combat weapon demonstrated that under certain conditions they could be a good means of transport and could be used for flights not only over friendly territory, but also for penetrating deep into the enemy rear. From the very first days of the War of 1914-1918 aircraft began to conduct aerial reconnaissance of the enemy, penetrating far beyond his main line of resistance.

In the course of World War I the opposing sides made guarded use of aviation to move scouts and saboteurs at first, but towards the end of the war their destruction of railroads, viaducts, tunnels, locks and bridges became a frequent phenomenon. Only the most experienced and well trained pilots of the opposing armies -- Germans, French, Italians and Russians -- were picked to land scouts and saboteurs behind enemy defensive lines.

In the years of the Civil War and foreign intervention our Red pilots boldly landed "flying coffins" in the White rear. Thus on the Eastern Front pilots of the air group commanded by Soldier I. U. Pavlov, a pilot of the Czarist Army and a Party member from 1917, more than once successfully fulfilled special missions in the White rear.

Once a very difficult and dangerous mission of delivering our scouts behind the front line was assigned to I. P. Satunin, a pilot of this group who was distinguished by courage and decisiveness.

Satunin donned civilian clothes, with the passport of an Astrakhan' shopkeeper in his pocket in case he had to destroy the plane and make his way back across territory seized by the enemy. He placed his passenger in the cabin of a worn-out Farman and flew off to the east.

Although this was not Satunin's first sortie to accomplish a special mission, the group commander awaited his return restlessly, since calculations showed his fuel was running out. Then a low-flying aircraft appeared. Several minutes later it had landed, or rather flopped down, at the very edge of the airfield. Everyone on the field ran to the aircraft. Satunin, covered with wounds, crawled from it with difficulty. A smile was reflected in his eyes, for he had landed on his own airfield with the last drop of fuel, thus successfully accomplishing his mission.

Aircraft of the Civil War and World War I were still so imperfect that to land them on an unfamiliar field was a difficult matter and frequently led to the death of experienced aviators and their passengers. This circumstance forced a search for new, more sophisticated methods of landing people in the enemy rear, behind defensive lines.

Attention was primarily directed toward the possibility of using parachutes for this purpose. They had begun to be used in aviation in the form of a "life belt" as obligatory equipment for the pilot. As early as the end of World War I the first attempts had been made to drop scouts and saboteurs by parachute from planes flying at a specific altitude above the landing field. This was in essence the birth of the idea of the modern military theory of "vertical envelopment" — movement of troops by air. Aviation allowed the crossing of artificial and natural barriers to envelop the enemy not only horizontally (along the ground), but also vertically (by air).

At the same time the limited capabilities of aircraft of that time did not permit many people or heavy cargoes to be lifted into the air. This is why not one army fighting in World War I succeeded in practically carrying out the idea of "vertical envelopment." Before the end of the war this idea was not theoretically grounded nor tested in practice by anyone. At the same time the small combat episodes of people being landed in the enemy rear with the help of aviation became the precursors of the appearance of a new means of waging mobile warfare — the airborne forces.

After World War I was over military leaders summed up results, generalized military experience and sought new areas in the organization and outfitting of troops and in methods of conducting future operations.

They attempted to determine the place in the organization of armed forces of each country which should be occupied by the aviation, tanks and other means which appeared in the course of the war. Military theoreticians carried on hot disputes as to which should be given preference: cavalry or infantry, the very old navy or young aviation? They argued over which was capable of taking warfare from the blind alley of position warfare and giving it a mobile character. But none of them recalled the first tests, even though small, of transferring armed personnel by air. None saw in the rapidly developing aviation a potential of landing major airborne parties or the mass movement of troops by air in future operations.

Along with an increase in numbers of aircraft after World War I there were increases in speed, altitude and range and, more important, in the lift capability of aircraft. Aviation in its development opened new possibilities in accomplishing deep offensive operations. It moved forward alluring prospects for its use in moving considerable numbers of troops, heavy cargoes and combat equipment by air.

The theoretical development of questions on the role, place and main missions of airborne forces in warfare was for the first time quite sufficiently completed in the thirties by Soviet military art. Our theoreticians believed that the most favorable maneuver in offensive operations was envelopment of the enemy flanks and rear with subsequent encirclement. But such a maneuver demanded that the offensive forces concentrate great strength to penetrate the enemy defense and create powerful shock groupings with the goal of subsequent actions to envelop, encircle and destroy the enemy. However, the obstacle to conducting such an operation was that as soon as the offensive gave an indication of success, numerous defensive reserves rushed to the sector of penetration and there began an exhausting, intense struggle in a limited sector of terrain and the tempo of the offense was reduced.

Under these conditions, skillfully landed airborne forces could exercise substantial influence on the conduct of an offensive operation. Well armed airborne units appear unexpectedly for the defenders on routes used to bring up reserves, on the most important lines of communication, at crossings, in various types of defiles, on rear area defensive lines and in areas previously outside the zone of combat operations. With bold and rapid actions they cut off the enemy from everything which supplies, reinforces and supports him.

Thus the surprise blow of forces landed in the rear of the enemy defense, in coordination with troops advancing from the front, was an important factor in successfully carrying out a deep offensive operation.

As a rule, even in the thirties airborne landings were proposed to be employed for those missions which could not be accomplished at the given

moment more effectively by other means. They were to be massed and used to surprise the enemy, and were to be landed in his rear in a short period of time.

Soon it became possible to make a practical check of the theoretical premises in various exercises by Red Army troops, since the material and technical conditions were created for employment of airborne landings.

A parachute landing was made for the first time in history on 2 August 1930 in a test demonstration exercise of the air forces of the Moscow Military District. The exercise was directed by military pilots L. G. Minov and Ya. D. Moshkovskiy. Twelve parachutists were dropped into the enemy rear and their armament — rifles, machine guns and ammunition — was dropped in cargo parachute bags from R-1 aircraft. Here it should be noted that the Red Army employed air-landed forces as early as the Civil War and in Central Asia in 1927-1929 in the struggle against the Basmachi.

But what preceded this day, which was historic for the Soviet airborne forces?

When the test demonstration exercise of air forces of Moscow Military District was planned for August 1930, the RKKA /Rabochye-Krest'yanskaya Krasnaya Armiya; Workers' and Peasants' Red Army/ VVS /Voyenno-vozdushnyye Sily; Air Forces/ command assigned L. G. Minov the mission of preparing and demonstrating the drop of a group of armed parachutists into the enemy rear to carry out acts of sabotage on enemy territory.¹ This assignment was the practical beginning of airborne activities in our country.

Military pilot L. G. Minov, a member of the CPSU since 1917 and a participant of the Civil War, was sent to the United States in 1929 by the VVS command to study the experience of emergency rescue service in aviation. Returning with a parachutist's diploma and the experience of three parachute jumps, he became a parachute enthusiast and in the spring of 1930 began training pilots to make practice and demonstration jumps.

The first parachute exercises in our country involving jumping from an aircraft began on 26 July 1930 near Voronezh. This day became the birthday of Soviet parachute sport.

One twin-engined Farman-Goliath was adapted for making the first parachute drop. The demonstration and training jumps had been made from it during the Voronezh parachute exercise. It was used even though first-class TB-1 bombers were at that time already in the Air Force arsenal. These latter were used for airborne landing purposes somewhat later.

¹TsGSA /Tsentral'nyy Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Sovetskoy Armii; Central State Archives of the Soviet Army/, fond 29, opis' 50, delo 185, list 173.

The fact that all parachutists were in one cabin of the aircraft also had much significance at first. This preserved a feeling of fellowship and eased observation of the parachutists while preparing them for the jump and in their separation from the aircraft. Jumps were made from the small door of the aircraft.



A Farman-Goliath aircraft

Ten volunteers from among those who had already made training jumps were selected to take part in the landing. They were broken down into two detachments. The first detachment was headed by L. G. Minov and the second by his immediate assistant and friend, military pilot Ya. D. Moshkovskiy. Such a division of the airborne landing force was dictated by the lift capability of the aircraft, which could lift not more than six or seven men. Inasmuch as this was the sole aircraft adapted to drop parachutists, the airborne landing could be made only in two trips. In the interval between them it was planned to drop six cargo parachute bags with weapons and ammunition from three R-1 aircraft.

The basic mission of the airborne landing consisted of a check of the technique of dropping parachutists, weapons and ammunition, not in showing their tactical actions.

It was also intended to obtain certain initial data for subsequent employment of airborne landings, and in particular to determine the degree of dispersal of a group of parachutists, the distances from which descending airborne troops were visible (depending on the drop altitude), and the time needed to collect the cargo dropped by parachute and for the airborne troops to become fully combat-ready. To this end it was decided to drop the first group from an altitude of 500 meters, the weapons from 150 meters and the second group from 300 meters.

The day came for the drop of the first experimental parachute landing force. Minov's group took off first, together with Moshkovskiy, who was checking calculations for drop of the second group. After this the three R-1 aircraft took off. On the bomb racks under their wings each had two cargo parachute containers.

After circling the airfield the Farman-Goliath headed for the drop zone, which was an area 800 by 600 meters in size. The assembly point was to be a small farm situated beyond the edge of the zone. Minov's group of six left the aircraft within a period of 5 seconds and landed almost in the center of the zone. The aircraft turned and headed back.

The landing party quickly gathered their parachutes and collected around the group commander. Meanwhile the flight of R-1 aircraft passed over the zone at an altitude of 150 meters and dropped six cargo parachutes with weapons and ammunition, which landed on the edge of the zone not far from the farm. The parachutists ran to them and began unpacking the cargo bags (containers).

Soon the Farman-Goliath again appeared, this time with the second landing party. As was planned, Moshkovskiy dropped his group from a height of 300 meters. This must be regarded as a bold experiment when we consider that the parachutists were not sufficiently experienced and used parachutes which opened manually.

The second group landed near the cargo chutes. After taking up their weapons and ammunition the men of both groups headed for the farm. Several minutes later the parachute landing party of 12 men armed with two light machine guns, rifles, revolvers and hand grenades was already at the initial point, in full combat readiness for operations on enemy territory.

The plan of the first experiment was fulfilled and the signal was given to stop. The participants in the drop returned to their airfield in a truck.

In this manner the first parachute drop in the world was made.

However the Voronezh experiment did not end with this. In September of the same year a landing force of 11 armed men jumped from an ANT-9 aircraft in maneuvers of the Moscow Military District.¹ The commander was Moshkovskiy. While the parachute drop at Voronezh had the main goal of determining the possibility of dropping a group of parachutists, weapons and ammunition, the second parachute drop had a specific tactical mission. The men landed at daybreak, hid their parachutes in the woods and made a surprise raid on a division headquarters. After seizing operational documents they made it back across the front line to their own forces.

¹ TsGASA, fond 29, op. 50, delo 177, list 34.

In a Decree on Results of Combat Training of the RKKA for 1929/30, the USSR Revvoyensovet /Revolutsionnyy voyennyi sovet; Revolutionary Military Council/ noted successful tests in organization of airborne landings as an achievement of the Air Forces. In missions for 1931 it indicated the need for the RKKA staff to thoroughly study airborne landing operations from a technical and tactical side with the goal of preparing and distributing the appropriate instructions.¹

Thus 2 August 1930 was the birthday of the Soviet airborne forces.

In the thirties supplies of technical equipment were sought so as to provide parachute equipment not only for experimental work, but also for the Air Forces and the airborne units being formed. The small amount of foreign deliveries could not begin to satisfy our demands, and what is more, they were expensive. For example, in 1927 for the first time we purchased several hundred safety parachutes in the United States for 600 dollars each for the Air Forces. Both expensive and few! We needed thousands of parachutes for our rapidly developing aviation. In this regard there arose the keen need to urgently set up our own production of parachute equipment.

The Air Force command assigned the mission to the VVS Scientific Research Institute to conduct the requisite research in a short period of time. The command sent to the Institute military pilot and Party member M. A. Savitskiy, a graduate of the Air Academy imeni N. Ye. Zhukovskiy and a Civil War veteran. In the summer of 1928 the young engineer took charge of a small laboratory, or parachute work shop, in which at first there worked a total of eight enthusiasts.²

This small technical organization was the ancestor of today's large parachute industry.

In the spring of 1930 Savitskiy was sent, as was Minov, on detached duty to the United States, where he familiarized himself with the technology of producing parachutes. This trip allowed a comparison to be made between our technical plans for creation of a parachute enterprise and those of the Americans. However, this did not introduce any changes in our plans. By April of 1930 the first Soviet parachute enterprise began to put out its product: domestic series production of pilot (P1-1) and observer (Pn-1) parachutes. In addition to safety parachutes the Soviet Union's parachute plant in 1931 began to produce airborne landing parachutes with positive (automatic) opening, the P. I. Grokhovskiy system. At the end of 1931 these were replaced by PD-1 airborne landing parachutes designed by M. A. Savitskiy, the director and chief engineer of the parachute plant.

Beginning in 1931 our country began to free itself from the import of parachutes from the United States, since in the first two to three years of

¹TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 50, delo 109, list 19, delo 169, list 3.

²TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 26, delo 161, listy 4, 147.

production our domestic industry fully satisfied the demands of the Air Forces and the airborne troops for parachute equipment of various designs. Much of this was due to the great service of the talented design engineer M. A. Savitskiy, one of the pioneers of Soviet parachute making.

Soon a whole group of young designers of parachute equipment attached themselves to Savitskiy. These included F. Tkachev, N. Lobanov, I. Glushkov and others.

Thus 1930 became the year which saw the birth of parachute sport, Soviet airborne landings and the parachute industry.

Mar SU M. N. Tukhachevskiy, Commander of the Leningrad Military District, was one of the organizers of the Soviet airborne forces and one of the creators of the theory of their combat employment. In the middle of 1928, immediately after being assigned to this post, Mar Tukhachevskiy gave his staff officers the assignment of working up a paper on the subject "Actions of an airborne landing force in an offensive operation." Then a military game was held on this subject with the staff divisions and administrations. M. N. Tukhachevskiy spoke here about the inevitable change in the relationships of the combat arms and in their technical outfitting, mobility and maneuverability. He foresaw the appearance of a completely new combat arm -- airborne forces.

Mar Tukhachevskiy had a clear understanding that airborne landings were justified only if they were well equipped with everything needed to wage mobile combat with a strong enemy. While the problem of landing personnel was not so complicated and was resolved comparatively easily, the delivery of heavy weapons and transport to the landing force by air was at that time an exceptionally difficult mission. But it, too, had to be done, and in very short periods of time.

At the end of 1930 a design division was set up with the RKKA VVS Administration under the leadership of talented inventor and military pilot P. I. Grokhovskiy, who began working in the field of aviation technology as early as 1928. From 1930 on he was given the task of including airborne landing equipment in the work plan. This included packing for parachute landings, parachute containers for persons mounted under the wing, and airborne landing parachutes made of cotton instead of the costly silk. All this work was brought together under a common subject of "airborne infantry."

The accomplishment of this task of the RKKA VVS Revolutsionnyy voyernyy sovets; Revolutionary Military Council, which had an exceptionally important defense significance, demanded the availability of experimental production facilities. In this regard test workshops of the VVS NII Nauchno-issledovatel'skiy institut; Scientific Research Institute were transferred to the design division in March 1931.

The design division was later reorganized into the P. I. Grokhovskiy Special Design Bureau, the main mission of which was to design, produce and

test new models of different types of parachute equipment for the "airborne infantry."

Later the Experimental Institute of the Main Administration of the Aviation Industry of the USSR Narkomtyazhprom /Narodnyy komissariat tyzheloy promyshlennosti; People's Commissariat of Heavy Industry/ was organized on the basis of the OKB /Osoboye konstruktorskoye byuro; Special Design Bureau/ under the direction of P. I. Grokhovskiy.

In March 1931 the RKKA staff made a decision to set up in the Leningrad Military District a supernumerary test airborne landing detachment of 164 men, the first in the RKKA. The detachment's weapons were heavy and light machine guns, grenade launchers, two DRP guns, two T-27 tankettes and three armored vehicles. The soldiers were mounted on light vehicles and trucks, motorcycles with sidecars and bicycles. The detachment received the attachment of a heavy bomber squadron of 12 TB-1 aircraft and one corps air detachment of 10 R-5 aircraft.¹

M. N. Tukhachevskiy assigned the task of forming this detachment to one of the operational staff workers of the Leningrad Military District -- D. N. Nikišev. The detachment was to work out questions connected with the conduct of airborne landing operations. When formation was completed, Ye. D. Lukin took command of the detachment.

Soon the detachment was ready for its first landing, but as a preliminary condition Tukhachevskiy assigned the mission of training and including in the detachment a parachute echelon. According to his idea, the basic purpose of the parachute echelon was to seize an airfield or landing strip in the enemy rear and support the landing thereon of aircraft with the main forces and combat equipment of the airborne landing force.

The specialized training of this echelon, which received the short designation of PDO /parashyutnodesantnyy otryad; airborne parachute detachment/, was directed by L. G. Minov, an RKKA VVS Inspector for Parachute Affairs. On the basis of the PDO a staff of instructors was prepared in Krasnogvardeysk and parachute drills and medical research was conducted with the VVS flight personnel of the Leningrad Military District.

Instructors and members of the PDO held group demonstration jumps in the vicinity of the Pulkovo Hills and on the Komendantskiy Airfield in Leningrad.

In the fall of 1931 at an assembly of general officers of the Leningrad Military District in the vicinity of Leningrad a combined airborne parachute landing was successfully employed for the first time. This signaled a good beginning for the formation of the airborne forces. Later would follow the formation of specialized airborne units and large units and the creation of transport aviation capable of accomplishing airborne landings on a large scale.

¹TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 50, delo 86, listy 1-2.

The role of S. M. Kirov in creation of the first airborne units in the Leningrad Military District is now already known. As M. N. Tukhachevskiy before him, and I. P. Belov who replaced him, Kirov was of great help to designer Grokhovskiy in distributing his orders for airborne landing equipment in industry. After Kirov's tragic death, his name was bestowed upon the 201st Airborne Brigade of the Leningrad Military District.

It should be noted that P. I. Baranov, Commander of the Red Army Air Forces, and after his death Ya. I. Alksnis, also supported all undertakings of the first airborne paracutists. It was due to their help that the necessary conditions were created for successful design work in the field of airborne landing equipment.

By the time the PDO completed its training, the Grokhovskiy OKB had built and tested a special bracket for transporting vehicles, light guns and other military cargoes under the fuselage of the TB-1 aircraft. In addition to these brackets, the Bureau prepared an experimental set of wing-mounted overturning cradles designed to deliver men on the TB-1 aircraft to the site of the landing and automatically drop them. The men were supplied with parachutes with the P. I. Grokhovskiy positive opening system.



Dropping parachutists from individual
Grokhovskiy suspended cabins

In the process of testing the wing-mounted cradles, draftswoman L. S. Kuleshova became the first Soviet woman to make a parachute jump from an aircraft. On 9 July 1931 she was dropped along with others from a TB-1 aircraft over the Central Airfield imeni M. V. Frunze in Moscow. Five days later, on 14 July 1931, L. A. Grokhovskaya jumped from a wing-mounted cradle of a TB-1 aircraft in Moscow.

However this method of landing did not undergo troop testing. The passive and extremely tense condition of the parachutist, who lay in complete isolation in the cradle on his back for the entire flight to the drop zone and was then suddenly dropped, was not an easy experience. It excessively fatigued the parachutist and in the final account reduced his combat effectiveness after the landing.

One of the sessions of the USSR RVS in February 1932 made a special review of the problems connected with improving the work of the Grokhovski Special Design Bureau in the field of airborne landing technology. At the session it was noted that the fact that this Bureau was part of the VVS NII "did not sufficiently ensure the Bureau's work in the field of landing operations,"¹ and that the production of airborne landing parachutes was not fully developed.

Taking account of the importance and current nature of tasks before the OKB headed by Grokhovskiy, the USSR RVS decreed that it be placed in subordination to the VVS commander and that it concentrate all efforts on development of questions connected with technical support to airborne landings. In this regard the RVS found it necessary to considerably strengthen the OKB with engineering and technical personnel. It was proposed that within the period of a month the VVS Administration jointly with the RKKA Headquarters determine the tactical and technical requirements for special gear and weapons used by airborne landing detachments, and to urgently conduct tests of all Grokhovskiy's inventions for which there were models already prepared. An RVS Decree obligated the VVS, without awaiting results of state tests, to make an order for series production of airborne landing and cargo parachutes, suspended airborne landing cabins and a three-place air bus for troop testing.

K. Ye. Voroshilov, Chairman of the USSR RVS, directed the attention of VVS Commander Alksnis to the need to improve the work of the Grokhovskiy OKB and give it the necessary help.

An RKKA RVS Decree created the conditions for design and production of test and series models of air transport and airborne landing equipment. For example, the work plan of the VVS OKB for 1932 included the G-63 glider with a load capacity of 17 men and 500 kilograms of cargo, towed by a reconnaissance aircraft, and the even higher capacity G-64 glider with a load capability of 50 men. The latter was to be towed by the TB-1 bomber.

The OKB work plan also included parachute platforms (G-37a, G-38a, G-43, G-62) to be dropped with cargo chutes from the TB-1 aircraft. The platforms would hold 76-mm field pieces and pickup trucks. Another type, to be dropped from the TB-3 aircraft, would hold motorcycles with sidecars and tankettes. Appropriate cargo chutes were prepared for them (of the G-56, G-57, G-58, G-59A and G-72 types).²

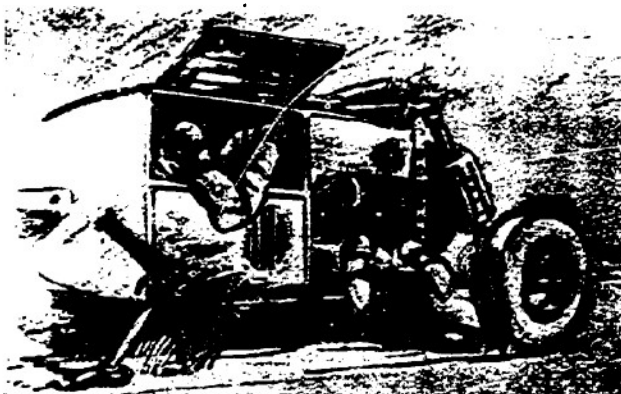
¹TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 54, delo 33, list 27.

²Ibid., list 58.

An original development of the Grokhovskiy OKB were cabins for dropping groups of men and cargoes without parachutes from a flight at zero altitude. These were the so-called air bus and airbus platform. For example the G-45a air bus, dropped from the TB-1 aircraft, was designed for a "unitary squad" of 11 men. The small G-68 air bus was designed for dropping cargoes from the R-5 aircraft and the G-51 airbus platform was for cargoes up to one ton.

The experimental and test work plan of the Grokhovskiy OKB included development of the G-53 instrument for pickup of cargoes and personnel from the ground onto an aircraft. There was also the interesting work of increasing the airborne landing capabilities of the TB-1 aircraft by increasing its range through refueling in the air from the R-5 aircraft.

Thus the question of dropping personnel and cargoes without parachutes arose in the thirties together with the idea of airborne landings.

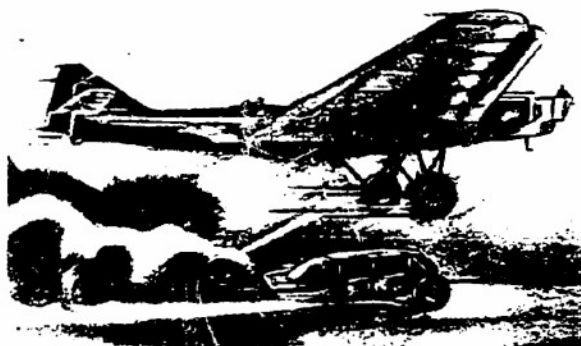


Placement of landing party in the Grokhovskiy air bus

What were the Grokhovskiy air buses? They were streamlined, flat containers with the profile of a thickened aircraft wing. They were equipped in the nose section with a good shock-absorbing two-wheel chassis and in the tail section with an aircraft tailskid with a rubber shock absorber. They were designed with various load capacities and were to be suspended under various aircraft then in use by the VVS.

From three to twelve armed personnel or a corresponding amount of cargo could be placed in the compartments. The men lay with their heads forward. The air buses were dropped from zero altitude onto a level strip. After separating from the aircraft, which flew at a height of 2-3 meters, the air bus continued moving behind the aircraft through inertia for the first few seconds. Then it moved into a flat descent and landed with a

skidding movement. All this was accomplished not only on the drawing boards, but in actual test models as well.



The Grokhovskiy air bus makes a landing

However the first of the parachuteless airborne landing equipment to be tested were the hydroair buses, designed to drop personnel and cargoes onto the water. Unfortunately there were no positive results achieved here. Two hydroair buses were dropped from zero altitude by a TB-1 aircraft and in spite of the calm sea they received such heavy blows at the moment of touching the water that the first was completely destroyed and the second was deformed and sank.

While the hydroair buses did not prove themselves in testing, a test model of a land air bus gave encouraging results. In the fall of 1931 it satisfactorily underwent its baptism of fire, conducted personally by P. I. Grokhovskiy and his deputy, I. V. Titov, who lay in the air bus as it was dropped from a TB-1 aircraft. This gave the basis for the decision of the USSR RVS to produce and give over for troop testing a series of three-place air buses, and for inclusion in the OKB work plan for 1932 of development and construction of test models of various air buses and airbus platforms for dropping personnel and cargoes without parachutes.

As we will see later, the first encouraging tests of air buses led military theoreticians to far-reaching theoretical conclusions, which were written into the Regulations for Operational-Tactical Use of Airborne Motor Landing Detachments, developed by the RKKA Headquarters in February 1932.

The air buses had no practical employment beyond the tests.

It is difficult to enumerate all the work on airborne landing and air transport equipment carried out in 1930-1935 in the Grokhovskiy OKB. It is evident that this interesting and important subject in the history of the development of the airborne forces was not forgotten by Grokhovskiy's closest assistants and co-workers in the OKB.

Grokhovskiy and his colleagues, V. O. Malynin, A. I. Privalov, M. A. Kavardayev, A. I. Sosnin, V. G. Baranov, B. A. Uralov, I. V. Titov and N. I. Preobrazhenskiy, were the initiators of the development of airborne landing technology.

P. I. Grokhovskiy, Chief of the Special Design Bureau, was awarded the Order of Lenin for creation of numerous items of airborne landing technology and for the repeated bravery and courage displayed in their testing.

In September 1931 during maneuvers of the Kiev Military District a parachute landing party of 29 men of the Leningrad PDO commanded by Minov was dropped from three ANT-9 aircraft to develop the success of the offense in the vicinity of the village of Mogilevka, near Kiev.¹ Right after them were dropped two DRP [dinamo-reaktivnaya pushka; rocket launcher], some machine guns and other weapons and ammunition.

The Chairman of the Ukrainian TsIK [Tsentral'nyy ispolnitel'nyy komitet; Central Executive Committee], G. I. Petrovskiy, and the Commander of the Kiev Military District, I. E. Yakir, were present at the parachute landing site. They observed the actions of the landing party, spoke with them and expressed confidence that the matter of airborne landings would undoubtedly receive wide application in our Army.

The mission of the Kiev parachute landing was to seize a landing strip near Mogilevka and support the debarkation of an air-landed party. This mission was successfully carried out. At the end of the month the detachment returned to Krasnogvardeysk and made a landing during maneuvers of troops of the Leningrad Military District.

The successes achieved in the field of development of airborne landings in 1931, along with a great number of deficiencies, were shown in quite some detail in an order by the Commander of the RKKA VVS summing up results. It stated that in 1931 under the leadership of Comrade Minov, Inspector for Parachute Affairs of the RKKA VVS Administration, and his assistants, Chief of the Parachute Section of the 5th Division of the RKKA VVS NII Comrade Moshkovskiy and instructors of the same Section, Comrades Shmidt and Baranov, parachute drills and classes were held, during which 550 experimental, demonstration and training jumps were made.

The above number of jumps was made by 160 persons, of whom 97 were flight personnel, 61 were servicemen of various combat arms and two were women — V. Fedorova and O. Chirkova.

The jumps were made by individuals and groups of from two to ten persons simultaneously at different times of day and from various types of aircraft.

¹ TsGASA, fond 29, op's' 35, delo 10, list 170.

All jumps were made in good order, not counting the negligible injuries and bruises connected mainly with inattention to the rules of landing.

In 1931 command and instructor personnel took part in experimental and demonstration work by making a number of night jumps and landing on an unlighted strip, jumps from low altitudes of 200-250 meters, jumps with medical recording apparatus, jumps with water landing and others. The experience gained had great importance in the matter of employing parachutes.

The parachute exercises in the Leningrad Military District were used to conduct medical research, during which a brigade of doctors of the Military Medical Academy made 360 individual examinations of those who jumped.

The research provided valuable material which for the first time shed light on questions of the psychophysiology of parachute jumping. It had practical importance in the selection of candidates for parachute work.

The parachute landing detachment trained in the Leningrad Military District demonstrated quite a good knowledge of its job during district maneuvers in the Ukrainian and Leningrad Military Districts.

The detachment made five landing operations during the maneuvers. Of these, one involved the simultaneous jump of 10 men, two of 20 men and two of 30 men, in addition to weapons, ammunition and rations, which were also dropped by parachute.

In the process of training the parachute landing detachment, the following men were trained for independent work as parachute instructors: A. Freyman (Moscow Military District), who made 12 jumps; V. Ol'khovik (Leningrad Military District), who made 10 jumps; V. Berezkin (Ukrainian Military District), who made 12 jumps; B. Petrov (Belorussian Military District), who made 10 jumps; N. Yevdokimov (Leningrad Military District), who made 11 jumps; and V. Baranov, acting Instructor of the Parachute Section of the 5th Division of the RKKA VVS NII, who made eight jumps.

All of them received the required theoretical skills for independent organization and were permitted to hold parachute classes and drills.

As was noted in the order, the above work, performed from April through October 1931, was done with great experience, excellent efficiency and love for the job by Ya. Moshkovskiy and parachute instructors G. Shmidt and V. Baranov, who worked as close assistants to L. G. Minov.

Using the demonstration method in their work, the directors of parachute exercises had made 56 experimental, demonstration and training jumps as of 1 January 1932, as follows: Minov -- 16, Moshkovskiy -- 23, Shmidt -- 17.

A detailed critique of all deficiencies in parachute matters was made in an order of the RKKA VVS Commander. It was noted in particular that

parachute training bore a seasonal character, as the jumps were performed only in summer. Few night jumps were made, although it was known that the most favorable time ensuring maximum success for a landing and combat operations by airborne landing forces was at night.

Attention was directed to the fact that "until now airborne parachute landings have been made using a primitive method, i.e. jumping singly, which greatly extends the period for making landings, reveals the landing site and disperses the airborne landing detachment."

The order demanded that attention be devoted to many technical questions: creation of maneuverable parachutes and development of separate types of parachutes for pilot, aerial observer, member of an airborne landing party and other specialists, since the one available parachute type couldn't satisfy all groups with their different work and surroundings; and development of a specific costume for the airborne soldier, suitable for operations on the ground and in the air while making jumps.

The order noted that one deficiency was the poor study made of the technical characteristics of parachutes of other countries, particularly those of the Italians. In addition it was noted that the instructor personnel had absolutely not learned to jump from great altitudes with delayed opening of the parachute, to leave an aircraft in an emergency while in a spin or steep dive, etc.

All these questions which were not resolved in 1931 were placed before the parachute instructors for 1932 as urgent and pressing tasks.

For the great work done in the field of airborne landings in 1931 the VVS Commander awarded certificates and monetary bonuses to comrades Minov, Moshkovskiy, Shmidt and Baranov, and certificates to pilot-parachutists comrades Ol'khovik, Berezkin, Petrov and Yevdokimov. All who performed jumps in 1930 and 1931 were awarded special chest insignia.

In the beginning of January 1932 a parachute plant was set up according to the plan of M. A. Savitskiy, N. A. Lobanov and V. Ye. Andrianov. In that same year it began series production of PT-1 training parachutes and PD-1 airborne landing parachutes. They were made as a set including a reserve parachute, in distinction from the Grokhovskiy parachute, which did not have a reserve.

This exceptionally important measure created favorable conditions for a rapid development of the Soviet parachute industry and ensured a considerable increase in the production of various types of parachutes, the demand for which rose from year to year.

In January 1932 the USSR RVS made the decision to organize four authorized airborne motorized detachments in the Leningrad, Belorussian, Ukrainian

and Moscow military districts.¹ The detachment in the Leningrad Military District was created on the basis of the test airborne landing and parachute landing detachments. M. V. Boytsov became commander of this detachment, which received the designation of Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment No. 3.² It included a parachute battalion of two companies and a landing group made up of an armored company, a motorized company and an artillery battery. A special squadron of TB-1 aircraft was attached to the detachment.

A branch of the P. I. Grokhovskiy Special Design Bureau under the direction of his deputy, I. V. Titov, was set up in the Leningrad Military District to outfit the detachment with landing equipment and various practice training shells, as well as to conduct experimental and test work on the basis of the detachment.

In February 1932 the RKKA Chief of Staff, A. I. Yegorov, sent the Commander of the 3rd Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment, Boytsov, the Regulations for the Operational-Tactical Employment of a Motorized Airborne Landing Detachment.³ Based on the experience of one year's work of the detachment, Boytsov was to give conclusions and recommendations on the Regulations.

This Regulation for the first time formulated the concept of "airborne landing" and what it was. All personnel and all equipment, weapons and combat cargoes were dropped in an airborne parachute landing using parachutes designed for different purposes.

Based on the aircraft capabilities and the airborne parachute landing equipment on hand at the time the Regulation was written, the parachutists were situated in the aircraft fuselage or were suspended beneath the aircraft in special cabins, from which the men were mechanically dropped by the airship commander.

All equipment, which was suspended with cargo chutes under the aircraft's wing, was also automatically dropped by the airship navigator.

Since the cargo chutes were of large size and demanded a certain amount of time to open it was recommended that cargoes be dropped from a height of 600-800 meters. The parachutists also jumped from this same altitude. In spite of the fact that the parachutes allowed jumping from lower altitudes, it was considered that in case of an emergency in the air the parachutist must have a reserve of time and altitude for orientation and to bring the reserve chute into operation. At that time there were no safety or automatic instruments on the parachute -- the man opened the parachute by hand.

¹TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 54, delo 13, list 1.

²TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 54, delo 18, list 6.

³Ibid.

The situation also determined use of the type of landing of personnel and cargoes known as the "zero altitude landing." In this method the men, weapons and cargoes were placed in special air buses which were special undercarriages with good shock absorption. They were suspended under the fuselage and were automatically dropped from low heights from a hedgehopping flight by the airship commander. A level strip and open approaches were required to make such an airborne landing.

In the air-landed method aircraft with men and cargoes made a landing on enemy territory. In this case the men were situated within the aircraft, while equipment and cargoes were suspended without parachutes under the fuselage and wings on external bomb racks.

And finally the mixed, or combined, airborne landing provided for the combination of all methods. A support detachment of parachutists was to be dropped first. Their task was to capture a convenient field strip or area for the zero altitude landing. After this, reliable ground support was organized for receiving the main forces of the airborne landing force in an air-landed mode.

From beginning to end fighters and ground attack aircraft covered the landing and subsequent ground actions of all forces.

The situation determined the missions which had to be accomplished by the motorized airborne landing detachments under various conditions of the combat operations of ground forces. If it were impossible for the landing force to link up with the advancing forces it was recommended that the motorized airborne landing detachments switch to partisan methods of actions in the enemy rear.

The People's Commissar for Army and Navy Affairs and the Chairman of the USSR Revvroyensovet, K. Ye. Voroshilov, was introduced to a motorized airborne landing detachment during a visit to units of the Leningrad Military District in September 1932. In his presence the parachutists demonstrated their combat mastery on the ground and in the air. In evaluating the results of work of the detachment's first year of existence the People's Commissar stated that they deserved the most serious attention and positive evaluation. He particularly noted the successes in methodology of training personnel to make parachute jumps by being lowered from a special tower and from suspended cabins, and in use of systems developed by designer Grokhovskiy involving cargo chutes, containers and other means for arming and outfitting airborne landing detachments.

Later in his order the Commissar noted that "this completely new field of work was accompanied by many difficulties for the first detachment. These difficulties were overcome with Bolshevik stubbornness and the persistence of all detachment personnel, and thanks to the constant attention to this matter on the part of the Commander of the Leningrad Military District, Comrade Belov, I. P."¹

¹Order of the USSR RVS No. 121 of 17 November 1932.



R-5 aircraft with cargo parachute containers suspended under the wings

This order gave thanks to all detachment personnel and to the head of the Grokhovskiy Special Design Bureau.

In 1933 a directive of the People's Commissar for Army and Navy Affairs expanded the airborne landing detachment No. 1 into the 3rd Special-Purpose Airborne Brigade (3 abon),¹ comprising a parachute battalion, a motorized and mechanized battalion and an air group of three squadrons of aircraft. Of these, two were heavy (TB-3) and one light (). The brigade now had a large personnel component and new combat equipment. It was used to train instructor personnel for new airborne units of other military districts. The brigade was commanded by M. V. Boytsov.

In accordance with the RKKA RVS Order of December 1932, 1933 saw the beginning of formation of supernumerary separate special-purpose rifle battalions in the Moscow, Leningrad, Belorussian, Ukrainian, Central Asian, North Caucasus and Volga military districts and in the Far East. By the end of 1933 29 such battalions were formed with a total strength of around 8000 men.²

In 1934-1936 the Kiev and Belorussian military districts began to form special-purpose airborne landing brigades on the model of the 3rd abon of the Leningrad Military District. Selected personnel from the supernumerary separate special-purpose rifle battalions joined the newly formed brigades.

¹ TsGASA, fond 29, opis' 54, delo 69, list 4.

² Ibid., list 8.

It is natural that without good air technical facilities it would have been impossible to switch from comparatively small experimental parachute detachments to a wide formation of airborne units. By the end of the first five-year plan the Soviet aviation industry had set up series production of heavy bombers which could be used for dropping troops by parachute or airlanding them.

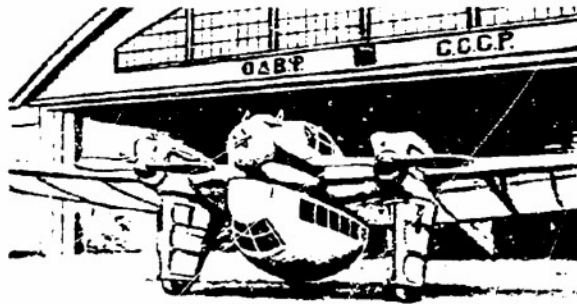
The passenger version of the ANT-4 aircraft first flew in November 1926. It was created by Soviet designers and workers and was at that time one of the largest aircraft in the world. This was a considerable victory of Soviet engineering and technical thinking. The aircraft was a twin-engine all-metal cantilever monoplane with a useful load of around three tons and a maximum speed in excess of 200 kilometers per hour.

Subsequently the ANT-4 (the military version was the TB-1) was subjected to a number of improvements. The aircraft could be refueled in the air and in its sturdiness and aerodynamic qualities it considerably surpassed the German Junkers bomber, then widespread in Europe. In a flight from Moscow across Siberia and the Pacific to New York the ANT-4 covered a distance of 20,000 kilometers, 8,000 of which were above water. This Soviet aircraft forced foreign designers to think hard. Influenced by the ANT-4, the United States later began to build the Boeing aircraft.

It was natural that an aircraft like the ANT-4 could be used in an airborne landing variation, and as soon as the first airborne landing experiments began light guns and vehicles were adapted so as to be carried on external brackets. As was already stated, designer Grokhovskiy expanded the airborne landing capability of the airship in the matter of carrying personnel. Twelve cradle containers were suspended on the bomb rack under the TB-1 aircraft. One parachutist lay in each of them on his back. To drop the men, the aircraft navigator pressed the lever of the bomb release mechanism and all containers turned bottoms up in sequence. As the parachutists fell their chutes opened automatically: a long pull rope was fastened with one end to the rip cord of the parachute and the other to the cradle. With this method of jumping, the parachutists were not given a reserve chute.

However soon designer Grokhovskiy created a suspended cabin (the Grokhovskiy cage) for the TB-1 aircraft. It held 12 parachutists, who jumped and manually opened their parachutes. The cabin was suspended under the aircraft between the wheel carriages.

It was in this aircraft that parachutists were trained in the years 1932-1934. At this same time work was underway to adapt another aircraft designed by A. N. Tupolev, the TB-3, for airborne landing purposes. The TB-3 got its start in life in 1929 and became known in the passenger model as the ANT-6. It considerably expanded the capabilities for the airborne landing of troops and combat equipment, since it had a gross weight of 18 tons and a useful load of up to five tons.



Suspended cabin (cage) for dropping 12 parachutists

The TB-3 airship was a four-engine all-metal cantilever monoplane of great size. The wing span was 40.5 meters. It was also distinguished in its high performance data: flight speed reached 225-230 kilometers per hour and the technical flight range with a bomb load of 2,500 kilograms reached 2,800 kilometers. The aircraft was used as a day and night bomber and had powerful armament.

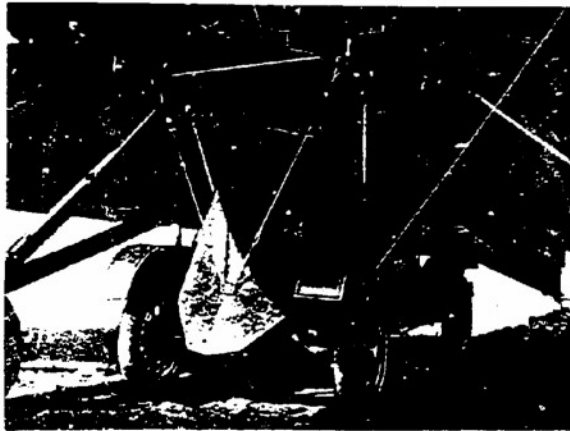


TB-3 aircraft being readied for take-off

In order to land troops and equipment the turret guns were removed and the bomb racks adapted to transport heavy equipment. It was possible to increase the airborne group to 50 men at the expense of fuel. An average load for the aircraft was considered 35-40 parachutists (in order to drop them as tightly as possible). At the order to "Get ready" the men moved up onto the fuselage in the places where the turrets were and on the surface of the wings. A portion remained in the aircraft and jumped through the door and bomb bays. Parachute jumps were made at speeds of 140-160 kilometers

per hour. The large number of jump-off points and the almost simultaneous leaving of the aircraft precluded the dispersal of parachutists over a large area.

The TB-3 successfully transported heavy weapons and transport on external brackets. This included the Ford-AA truck, the D-8 armored vehicle, 76-mm gun, two pickup trucks, motorcycles with sidecars, etc. In addition the team or crews of the equipment being transported were situated within the aircraft. After the aircraft landed on an airfield seized by parachutists the equipment was very quickly brought into combat readiness.



TB-3 aircraft with armored vehicle suspended under the fuselage

Thus already in the early thirties the Red Army had first-class air, parachute and other combat equipment in sufficient numbers to form a considerable number of large units and units of new airborne forces in a short time.

The first theoretical investigations and practical tests in the field of airborne landings permitted M. N. Tukhachevskiy even in those years to state in the work Novyye voprosy voyny (New Problems of Warfare) that we must prepare ourselves for the employment of airborne landings and not view them as an incidental happening. In his book he recommended that a dependable link be formed between such different phenomena as combat of airborne landing forces, tank breakthroughs, mass bombing strikes, artillery fire and the rapid attack of mobile infantry.

The first major parachute landing was made by over 900 armed parachutists in the fall of 1934 during maneuvers by troops of the Belorussian

Military District. In the next year this same Military District employed an even larger airborne landing. Almost simultaneously in the Kiev Military District a force was dropped and airlanded from aircraft under the leadership of Army Commander 1st Rank I. E. Yakir during major maneuvers. This landing had decisive influence not only on the further development of Soviet airborne forces, but on foreign military thinking as well.

The landing force dropped to the east of Kiev in the vicinity of Brovary and Gogolev was to hold up the approach of reserve defending to the east and seize river crossings near Kiev. By decision of the exercise director the airborne landing force included a rifle division command element, one parachute regiment, two airlanded regiments and special subunits. A special-purpose air brigade and two heavy air brigades of TB-3 aircraft were used for training, dropping and airlanding the parachute and airlanded forces.¹

On 14 September 1935 the young airborne forces proved with all convincingness their right not only for existence, but for further development as well. After landing the forces began an attack on Kiev and repulsed on the move an attack by a mobile counterlanding detachment. In the operation to seize a major administrative and political center they held up the approach of enemy reserves and made it possible for the advancing troops to destroy them piecemeal.

Here is how I. Dubinskiy tells of the Kiev airborne landing in his book Naperekor vetram (In Defiance of the Winds).

"The sky buzzed with fighters — formidable advance guards of the air armada. Aircraft with landing forces followed behind them. After landing, the men in blue coveralls gathered into combat groups and immediately seized the field. Under their cover the heavy machines settled onto the base of operations. The quick airborne infantry poured out of the capacious maw of the aircraft. Tanks, guns and trucks crept out from under the fuselage. Not more than a half hour had passed and three regiments of airborne troops were already set to go...

...The battlefield was surrounded by thousands of kolkhoz members, workers and employees. Everyone wanted to have a look at this unusual spectacle."²

It is known that the experience of the Kiev maneuvers played a large part in educating and training our command cadres. In addition this experience unfortunately also became the property of foreign armies. Officers of the German army studied it attentively, particularly the questions of conducting airborne landing operations, deep operational strikes by

¹TsGASA, fond 25899, opis' 34, delo 33, list 71.

²I. Dubinskiy, Naperekor vetram, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1964, p. 231.

mobile forces with the goal of encircling and destroying important enemy groupings, and close coordination of mobile forces and aviation. After World War II Hitler's generals in their memoirs did not hide the fact that in forming their airborne forces they used the rich experience of the Soviet Army.

Military delegations of foreign armies were present at the maneuvers and the critique. The French delegation was headed by Deputy Chief of the General Staff Brigadier General Loiseau, the Czech delegation by Chief of General Staff Gen Kreychi and the Italian delegation by Gen Monti. There were around 20 generals and officers in the three delegations.

The bright journalists immediately attacked the foreign guests who were observing the course of combat operations from a tower specially constructed for them. With the impressions fresh in his mind, Czechoslovak Col Dastikh dictated the following to a Krasnaya zvezda (Red Star) correspondent: "The airborne landing is a new combat arm created by the Bolsheviks." French Gen Loiseau stated: "I am struck by the successes of the airborne force. Western Europe has lagged behind." Gen Monti, the guest from Italy, stated: "I am literally enraptured about the employment of the airborne landing force..."¹

After returning home, British military publicist Ernst Henry wrote in 1935: "There is no doubt that in the very important new field of air technology -- mass parachutism and mass airborne landing of entire infantry regiments behind enemy lines -- the Soviet Union as of now enjoys a kind of monopoly.

During Red Army maneuvers near Kiev in the fall of 1935 the foreign generals present saw how 2,500 Red Army men in complete order landed from the air within a period of 10 minutes and immediately opened fire from automatic rifles. But as Voroshilov reported, they did not see the simultaneous landing in another part of the Soviet Union by a force of 5,700 men (more than a brigade) which carried out the very same operation. And still later they learned that the number of jumps made by the populace was approaching a million."²

After the maneuvers a troop parade took place at the same spot, on the field at Brovary not far from Kiev, in which the airborne troops also took part. "Then the men of the previously unknown combat arm appeared. All were in blue flight suits and cornflower blue helmets with parachutes behind their backs and weapons on their chests. Not a company, not a battalion, not a regiment, but an entire division! The parachutists moved lightly, smoothly and jerkily as if they were floating in the air with which their brave young spirit had become familiar.

And immediately a bright rain of flowers burst into their ranks. The division of airborne infantry passed in a storm of applause, to unceasing shouts of 'Hurrah' and to the sounds of a march."³

¹Dubinskiy, p. 231. ²Ibid., p. 232. ³Ibid., p. 332.

Those in charge of the maneuvers gave a high evaluation to the actions of the airborne units: "The actions of the airborne forces were considered brilliant both from an organizational and from a technical point of view. The tempo of movement, mobility and fire were excellent."¹

The People's Commissariat for Defense evaluated the employment of the airborne force in the Kiev maneuvers as follows: "...we must stress as the most important conclusion of the maneuvers the great success of the genuinely mass airborne landing, which proved the complete possibility for employing this new combat means to accomplish serious tactical and operational missions in future warfare."²

In 1936 there were major maneuvers by troops of the Moscow Military District involving participation of airborne forces and a large number of combat and transport aviation. The landing was made near the city of Vyazniki.

After the successful performances by the young Soviet airborne forces in 1934-1936 the problem of "vertical envelopment" did not leave the pages of the foreign press and specialized literature.

Many foreign authors of works on airborne landings remarked that only in the Soviet Union did military leaders take proper account of the worth of operational and tactical benefits of the mass employment of airborne landings and of the role and significance of the new means of waging armed warfare.

This is quite natural. The Soviet Army was the most advanced and revolutionary Army in the world. It relied on the ever increasing industrial might of the country and profound theoretical tenets of Soviet military science. It had a powerful air force and inexhaustible reserves of bold and devoted Soviet citizens. It was a pioneer in the theoretical and practical development of problems of the employment of airborne landings in modern warfare.

Not even the bourgeois military theoreticians deny this. For example, as early as the first year of World War II, when the Hitlerite command began to employ its airborne units in Belgium, Holland and other areas, the military reviewer of the New York Times Herbert Rosinsky wrote the following on 19 May 1940 in an article entitled "The Air Might of Germany":

"...The combination of parachute landings to seize airfields and air-landed forces making use of the airfields is a page torn from the book of the Red Army, which was the first to demonstrate these methods on a broad scale in the 1935 maneuvers.

¹ A. I. Yeremenko, V nachale voyny (At the Beginning of the War), Moscow, Nauka Publishing House, 1965, p. 11.

² Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal (Military Historical Journal), 1962, No. 5, p. 40.

At that time German specialists were very sceptical and believed the new type of weapon had chances for success only in lightly populated areas.

Nevertheless the German High Command became convinced of the impossibility to make a breakthrough with only ground units and began to propagandize the idea of airborne landings behind the enemy front line -- the so-called 'vertical envelopment.'

At the end of 1938 there was only one parachute battalion in the German Army, but by the spring of 1939 this battalion was expanded to a regiment..."

However the military leaders and military theoreticians of other capitalistic countries were also not able to remain indifferent to that which was shown during maneuvers of Soviet troops near Minsk and Kiev. In almost every country the question of airborne forces became the subject of lively discussions in military circles. The idea of their broad employment met a favorable reception in some countries, while in others it was considered doubtful or was rejected as groundless.

As early as the first year of World War II military reviewers of the United States and England were forced to admit that the Red Army maneuvers of 1935 involving an airborne landing near Kiev to capture a base of operations and support the landing of troops moved by air were the prototype of the airborne landing operation by Hitler's army in the capture of Rotterdam and other important objectives in Belgium and Holland.

Maj McShay, a well-known specialist in the field of airborne landings, stated in his book Vozdushnodesantnyye voyska (Airborne Forces), published in London in 1943, that all the Russian operations in the prewar years assumed the presence of a high degree of coordination with air force units in support of the combat operations of the landed parachutists. Even at this stage the high command of the Soviet Army understood the importance of the fact that the troops which were to fight on the ground at the end of their flight were neither "flying infantrymen" nor flyers carrying out special missions in the combat situation, but were a completely new combat arm.

One must agree with this. The Soviet military command clearly saw the role and importance of airborne forces from their very inception. Even in 1936 the Field Regulations of the Red Army contained precise directions for the use of airborne units. On page 7 it is stated: "Parachute landing units are an effective means to disorganize the enemy's control and rear area work. In coordination with troops advancing from the front, the parachute landing units can have decisive influence¹ on the total rout of the enemy on a given axis."

In the prewar years during a brief period of time the Red Army mastered to perfection the airborne landing and air transport technology and continuously trained and exercised young airborne troops in coordinated

¹This phrase stressed by the author [Ed. note].

actions with aviation and mobile forces in the course of major exercises and maneuvers. But when the days of the Great Patriotic War came — days which were severe for the Soviet people — the "winged infantry" became an active participant in many very important engagements.

The events of the Great Patriotic War will never be erased from the people's memory. Many heroic exploits were accomplished by Soviet troops during these years, and among them the airborne parachutists occupy a worthy spot. From the first to the last days of the war they made many landings in the enemy rear to accomplish important combat missions. And when the situation demanded, the airborne forces fought bravely in the ranks of the Guards infantry on many fronts of the Great Patriotic War. And everywhere the airborne Guardsmen fought they enjoyed deserved combat authority.

Chapter II

ON THE EVE OF WAR

Even on the threshold of the Great Patriotic War our young airborne forces received a certain amount of combat experience. In the battles on Khalkhin-Gol the airborne forces of the 212th Airborne Brigade in the Far East took part. They at first made up the Army Group reserve along with the 9th Motorized Rifle Brigade. Later the 212th Airborne Brigade took part in battles to capture the important Hill Fui jointly with the Northern Group of Forces. The Japanese had to be driven out of each slit trench with grenades and bayonets.¹

In June 1940 large airborne units (201st, 204th and 214th airborne brigades) took part in the Red Army's campaign of liberation into the Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia and Bessarabia.

In the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939-1940 airborne brigades of the Leningrad, Belorussian and Kiev military districts operated successfully together with other combat arms as ski and motorized rifle units.

Use of the parachutists in Bessarabia was the most instructive and closest to a combat situation.

The Red Army crossed the Soviet-Romanian border on the morning of 28 June 1940 in accordance with an arrangement with the Romanian government. The troops moved in two echelons: the first contained tank and cavalry units and the second — rifle divisions. In addition, three airborne brigades — 201st, 204th and 214th — were designated for use by the Air Force Commander. These brigades moved by rail to the initial position for an airborne landing.

The airborne forces received the mission of capturing important points and positions on the routes of withdrawal of Romanian forces and maintaining order in occupied areas until approach of mobile forces of the Red Army.

¹See Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945 (History of the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union 1941-1945), vol. I, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1963, p. 243.

Four heavy bomber air regiments (TB-3) were placed in an air group and used for the landing. The group included a total of 170 heavy airships adapted for dropping men and cargoes by parachute.

The route from the initial position to the landing area was around 360 kilometers long.

After a successful landing in the area 12 kilometers to the north of Bolgrad units of the 204th Airborne Brigade occupied the city by the end of 29 June. The next day it was planned to drop the 201st Airborne Brigade in the vicinity of Izmail while the 214th Airborne Brigade remained at the disposal of the Air Force Command.

On the morning of 30 June the 201st Airborne Brigade, commanded by I. S. Bezuglyy, took off in groups of six aircraft each. The Brigade's missions were to occupy the city of Izmail, set up blocking forces on the roads leading from the city to the west, maintain order in the city, place a guard on all warehouses, property, structures and plants and prevent ships from departing the harbor.

The size of the Izmail airfield did not allow for the landing of a large number of heavy aircraft. Therefore it was decided to land personnel by parachutes.

...The signal was given to jump. The parachutists moved toward the doors and hatches calmly and confidently. Every second there appeared new dots, and finally the entire sky was filled with white cupolas. Smoothly rocking on their parachutes, hundreds of parachutists in full battle array approached the ground.

Thousands of people applauded their liberators. All of them were ready to embrace the Soviet parachutists, envoys of the mighty socialist Motherland.

The parachutists landed one after another. Men, women and children ran to meet them. Excited and interrupting one another, each person tried to tell of his joy today and his sorrow of yesterday.

After the landing the Soviet parachutists established control over the most important objectives of the city and over the new state border by the end of the day, arranged for the reception of refugees and maintained exemplary order in the city.

This airborne landing during the campaign of liberation in Bessarabia, conducted under conditions of peacetime, demonstrated the correctness of our theoretical views and the organizational calculations for the employment of major airborne landing forces.

A new Red Army Field Service Regulation (FU-40) came out in 1940 on the eve of the Great Patriotic War. It specifically defined the role and missions of the airborne forces. Thus Article 23 stated: "VDV [vozdushno-

desantnyye voyska; airborne forces⁷ are an instrument of higher command, used to accomplish those missions in the enemy rear which cannot be accomplished at the given moment by other combat arms, but which if carried out might have a serious effect on the outcome of the entire operation or battle. The VDV must be employed unexpectedly for the enemy and in large numbers. They must be used independently and in coordination with ground, air and naval forces carrying out the given operation."

Further on the regulation placed on the airborne forces the following missions: disruption of control of troops and work of the enemy rear area by attacking headquarters; destruction of means of communication and routes of communication; interruption of movements of enemy troops, ammunition and supplies to the front; capture and destruction of enemy airfields and air bases; seizure of coastal areas to support naval landing forces; and reinforcement of troops operating in an encirclement and mobile large units accomplishing missions in the enemy's operational depth.

In addition the airborne forces were to be used to battle enemy airborne landings in their rear.

As the regulation indicated, use of airborne landing forces demanded organization of thorough reconnaissance of the drop or landing zone and area of landing force operations, concealment and surprise in employment, reliable support by combat aviation of transportation of the landing force and its subsequent ground operations, strict accounting of the time needed for the landing force to prepare for and accomplish the operation and combat mission, and organization of reliable communications with the landed force.

At the end of 1940 the strength of the airborne brigades had increased twofold. In November the People's Commissar for Defense Mar SU S. K. Timoshenko approved the new tables of organization for airborne brigades. A brigade included three combat groups: parachute, glider and airlanded group with a total strength of around 3,000 men.

A parachute group had two parachute battalions, a motorcycle-bicycle recon company and a communications company. The glider group had a similar organization. The airborne and glider battalions were considered separate units and consisted of three companies of 141 men each. Subordinate to the battalion headquarters were a communications platoon, a reconnaissance platoon (37 men), a sapper demolition platoon, a combat rations and supply platoon and a medical squad. The parachute rifle company had three rifle platoons of 38 men each, a mortar platoon with 50-mm mortars and a control squad (12 men). There was a total of 546 men in the parachute battalion.

The airlanded group had a mortar company (nine 82-mm mortars), an air defense company (12 heavy antiaircraft machine guns), a company of 11 T-40 or T-38 tanks and a two-battery artillery battalion (four 45-mm guns and four 76-mm mountain guns).

In addition the airborne brigade included a school for junior commanders and service subunits. The mobile equipment included 67 motorcycles and 54 bicycles.

Before April 1941 the airborne forces had six brigades: three based in the European part of the Soviet Union and three in the Far East. In 1940 the 211th and 212th airborne brigades were transferred to the Ukraine. Before March 1944 only the 202nd Airborne Brigade remained in Khabarovsk, and later it too was relocated to Moskovskaya Oblast.

In accordance with the missions assigned the airborne forces, in the spring (March-April) of 1941 there began the formation of airborne corps (from the 1st through the 5th) on the base of the existing airborne brigades (201st, 204th, 211th, 212th and 214th). Each corps numbered over 10,000 parachutists.¹ The corps included three airborne brigades, which had light T-37 tanks and BA-64 armored vehicles.

The control element of the airborne corps had a separate tank battalion with three tank companies (50 tanks in all) and a separate long-range communications platoon (4-RSB). Later a communications company was formed in place of the corps headquarters radio platoon. The company had in addition a flight of control aircraft and a mobile equipment platoon (15 motorcycles). The number of tanks in the battalion was later reduced to 32.

The tables of organization of the airborne brigades also changed. The glider and airlanded groups were abolished and the strength of the battalions was somewhat reduced (to 458 men). The third platoon of the parachute rifle company received 24 portable flame throwers. The number of artillery pieces increased in the brigade: six 76-mm Model 1927 guns, 12 45-mm guns and six 82-mm mortars. The brigade retained the bicycle reconnaissance company (113 bicycles) and the air defense company was transformed into an antiaircraft machine gun company (6-mm, 12-mm and 7-mm machine guns).

It was characteristic that the brigade's separate communications company received a communications flight of four Po-2 aircraft. However in actuality not one brigade had any aircraft.

A new table of organization for the airborne brigade was introduced in September 1941. It considerably increased the strength of the parachute battalion (to 678 men) and increased its tactical independence. In addition to three parachute rifle companies the battalion included a mortar company, sapper demolition, machine gun and flame thrower platoons and a communications platoon.²

¹USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, fond 71, opis' 301224, delo 1, listy 10-15, 98, 203.

²At this same time five more airborne corps (from the 6th through the 10th) were formed in addition to those existing since April 1941. In September 1941 there were around 200,000 well trained parachutists.

During the course of the Great Patriotic War the organization of units and large units changed subject to the possibilities of saturating the airborne forces with combat equipment, but the battalion always remained the basic tactical unit ready to conduct independent combat operations in the enemy rear.

By the beginning of the war we succeeded in achieving a sufficiently high level of personnel training, good cohesiveness and good tactical training of individual airborne brigades. The operational and tactical training of commanders and staffs of new airborne large units, especially corps, which were still in the formation stage, was poor.

Personnel of the airborne forces wore the uniform of VVS flight personnel. The ration norms and monetary and clothing allowances of officers, sergeants and rank and file personnel were also made equal to VVS norms.

The Communist Party and Soviet people did everything they could, not just to create a new combat arm — the airborne forces, but also to transform them into a formidable force for any enemy. Foremost citizens of the country were sent to the airborne forces: Party members, Komsomol members, and the best of our Soviet youth.

The Leninist Komsomol, which sent their best sons, deserve exceptional merit in the formation of the airborne forces. The VLKSM Central Committee held several mobilizations of Komsomol members. A large number of leading Komsomol workers went into the troops. The officers were obtained from the graduates who completed military schools with excellent marks. Individual subunits and units consisted of 100 percent Party and Komsomol members during the war years.

The Communist Party is the creator and educator of the airborne forces. They are obligated to the Party for their development, perfection and successes.

Chapter III

ON THE WESTERN LINES

The War Began

The treacherous attack of Hitler Germany on the Soviet Union caught our airborne corps stationed in the Baltic, Belorussia and the Ukraine in the stage of formation and bringing together staffs and control organs. The difficult situation which existed in the first days of the war forced us to commit these corps against the enemy as ordinary large motorized rifle units.

However even in the course of battles many airborne units and large units were gradually taken out of the army in the field so as to be brought up to strength and formed in the deep rear of the country.

At the end of August 1941 there was definition of the organizational command and control structure of the Commander of Airborne Forces, the system of commendation of personnel for service and the procedures for material and technical support. There was an explanation of the missions, questions of air support to airborne landing operations, etc.

Based on the fact that the airborne forces were a specialized combat arm, they were taken out of subordination to fronts and resubordinated directly to the Air Force Commander. It was only by permission of the People's Commissar of Defense that they could be employed for landings in the enemy rear or for conducting combat operations as part of armies and fronts in the form of large Guards rifle units.

The following missions were placed on the airborne forces: supporting ground forces in encircling and destroying the enemy; disorganizing the control of enemy forces and rear area operations; capturing and holding important positions, crossings and points in the enemy rear; seizing and destroying enemy airfields and air bases; and supporting naval landings by capturing sectors of the coastline.

A Military Council headed by the Commander, Maj Gen V. A. Glazunov, was formed to control the forces. Appointed as members of the Military

Council were Regimental Commissar I. S. Belyakov, Col Ye. V. Ivanov (he was also Chief of the Main Administration of the VDV and First Deputy Commander), Commissar of Main Administration of the VDV Brigade Commissar S. G. Kizevich, Deputy Commander of Airborne Forces Col A. M. Dosik, Chief of Staff of Airborne Forces Maj Gen Avn P. P. Ionov and Inspector of Airborne Forces Col M. P. Spirin.

The Military Council had a staff, inspection authority, political division, air squadron for control and communications and a personnel division.

In addition, the following administrations were part of the Main Administration of Airborne Forces: formation and staffing, weapons, special supply and service, a division of military educational institutions and an administration office.

The staff of the airborne forces received the mission of controlling operational training of staffs of large airborne units, developing manuals, instructions and directives on combat employment and supply of airborne landing forces. studying and generalizing experience of combat employment of airborne landing forces by Soviet and foreign armies, and preparing and conducting airborne landing operations under the Commander's leadership.

By the beginning of the Great Patriotic War the airborne forces as a whole already possessed rich theoretical and practical experience in their employment and had well trained units and large units.

Both the Field Service Regulations (PU-40) and Regulations on the VDV dated 1941 considered as the basis of effective employment of airborne forces in any operations the maximum possible support given them by transport aviation so as to land them in short periods of time. What were the combat transport capabilities of the Soviet airborne forces?

While new airborne corps were being formed in September 1941 there began the staffing of ten separate air transport squadrons, five separate air detachments and a flight test center of the airborne forces. Later, in August 1942, all these air units were brought together into separate airglider (two) and air transport (two) regiments. The regiments had U-2, R-5, DB-3, TB-3 and PS-84 aircraft. The airborne forces had few aircraft and it was with great difficulty that specialized training of airborne troopers was carried on. It is natural that these few various types of aircraft could not be seriously considered a means of landing major airborne forces. Suffice it to say that over 120 TB-3 aircraft were needed to drop just one airborne brigade, while at that time the airborne forces had less than twenty such aircraft in operation.

While by the beginning of the Great Patriotic War we had a sufficient number of trained airborne formations which could carry out any missions specified by the Field Service Regulations, the qualitative and quantitative status of the air transport in no way met the requirements for mass combat employment of airborne forces. Moreover, it must be kept in mind that the

pool of TB-3 heavy bombers of the VVS, which could be adapted for landing troops, suffered very heavy losses in the first days of the war and could not be counted on. It is true that even in 1942-1943 there appeared transport regiments of long-range aviation equipped with Li-2 aircraft. However they also did not introduce substantial changes in this direction, since they could not be used to drop even light combat equipment with cargo chutes. After landing, the airborne forces had only their light arms and mortars, which considerably reduced their combat capabilities.

Some foreign military historians in articles and works devoted to the employment of airborne landing express perplexity as to why the Russians, who were the pioneers in airborne landings, employed their well trained parachutists in the last war on a limited scale. In attempting to explain this, they frequently distort the real state of affairs, not wishing to understand and objectively evaluate the situation in the initial period of the Great Patriotic War.

From the first days of the war the Soviet Air Force lost a considerable number of fighters. This led to absolute air supremacy for Hitler's aviation. There were also significant losses in ground attack and bomber aviation. Under these circumstances it was not possible to make major airborne landings, which would have required not only military transport, but also fighter cover and the support of ground attack and bomber aviation.

Moreover, the situation which had by this time arisen on the Soviet-German Front did not lend itself to employment of major airborne landings in the enemy rear, since the Red Army was forced to withdraw to the east under pressure from superior enemy forces.

However when the Red Army began a counteroffensive by Moscow, on the Volga and in other regions and then began a broad offensive on the entire Soviet-German Front, there was a frequent need for the participation of the airborne forces. This could not be done, however, since until the end of the war our aviation did not have a sufficient number of transport aircraft.

The extremely limited military transport aviation and the Civil Air Fleet were forced to resolve national economic tasks in support of uninterrupted work of the defense industry and rear area of the country and to supply numerous units and large units of partisans, etc.

Account must also be taken of the unique situation which arose in the rear of Hitler's troops when they were in no position to control many areas of our country which were temporarily occupied, due to the active partisan activities. Under these conditions those missions which might have been accomplished by airborne landing forces in the interests of advancing troops were frequently to a certain degree accomplished by partisan units and large units. This explains the circumstance that during the Great Patriotic War the Red Army employed airborne landings in limited scale, although it had well trained and sufficiently equipped airborne units and large units.

In Belorussia

From the first days of the war units and large units of airborne forces operated as part of the ground forces in the form of rifle and motorized rifle large units. Together with troops of other combat arms they offered stubborn resistance to the attacking Hitlerite armies in the Baltic, Belorussia and the Ukraine. Particular note should be taken of the successful operations in the enemy rear by the 214th Airborne Brigade of the 4th Airborne Corps. The Brigade was commanded by Col A. F. Levashev, one of the first commanders and organizers of the airborne forces. For around three months Levashev's troops made daring raids on Hitlerite garrisons, headquarters, and rear areas. They mercilessly destroyed enemy troops and combat equipment.

Unfortunately there are few remaining men of this legendary brigade and almost no documents telling of their combat in the first days of the war. In the fall of 1941 the newspaper Krasnaya Zvezda published the diary of a military correspondent, Senior Political Officer A. F. Polyakov, in which there were several pages about Levashev's airborne troops. They are given below with certain abbreviation and corrections.

At that time Polyakov was with a group of forces which broke out of encirclement to the east, moved to the area of operations of the parachutists, and joined up with them. This was on 9 July 1941.

9 July 1941. Today is a happy day for us, as we met with our Soviet airborne landing force commanded by Comrade Levashev. This detachment has been operating in the fascists' rear for several days already.

I am doubly happy. It turns out that the detachment Chief of Staff is Maj V. Schensnovich, author of articles on airborne landings published in Krasnaya zvezda — our author! In me there immediately began to speak a patriot of our newspaper.

"Well prepare an article for us," I told Schensnovich.

"No, write it yourself. I don't have time now," the Major said abruptly.

So I am writing in my diary about the exploits of troops of the airborne force, who amaze even our people with their boldness.

...Dusk. German trucks with boxes rush along the highway. The fascists are hurrying to deliver ammunition to the front. There is a sharp turn and the driver of the lead vehicle slows down.

The detachment of Capt Ye. I. Lebedev is hiding in the bushes near the road. "Work" with fascist transport is his specialty. The Captain does not remove his gaze from the passing column of motor vehicles. Beyond the curve the drivers again step on the gas, driving the vehicles forward

without looking around. The last three trucks approach the turn. It is time to begin -- the tail of the column has to be cut off...

At the Captain's signal our troops dash out of the bushes and hop onto the running boards of the vehicles. In an instant our fighter appears in the cabin of the truck.

Only specially trained people can operate with such gymnastic agility. Seeing a black pistol in front of his nose, the German driver sharply brakes the vehicle. This is how vehicles with rations and ammunition were seized.

11 July. We are continuing to operate in the enemy rear together with Levashev's detachment. In the morning I attend reports of the commanders of separate groups of airborne troops who have returned from their night's "work."

Capt F. N. Antroshchenkov was ordered to destroy a fascist artillery supply depot and a fuel dump. The assignment was very risky for the lives of the men, as several tens of thousands of shells were in the supply depot.

A group of 50 men under the Captain's command set off into the woods and began to stealthily make their way to the depot. Near it sentries were leisurely walking their rounds. There were eight of them. They were quietly and simultaneously covered with ponchos and killed. The very same fate fell to the entire group of guards, which tried to offer resistance. There were shells in cellars, boxes, on the ground, and in motor vehicles.

After carefully examining the trucks and seeing that they were in working order, Antroshchenkov muttered: "We knew that we wouldn't go home on foot!" Mines were placed in the main cellar and on one of the vehicles. The fuses were quickly lighted and the men jumped into the idling vehicles.

"It's good to admire fireworks from a distance!" shouted Antroshchenkov to a dawdling soldier, who then jumped over the side of the truck in one bound.

The airborne troopers hadn't traveled two kilometers when the earth shuddered. Shells and aerial bombs thrown up by the monstrous explosions in the burning depot began to fly over their heads with a howl and a whine. But there could be no hurry. First they had to accomplish the second part of the assignment: blow up the fuel dump located nearby. This turned out to be rather easy, since the guard on the dump had run away. The men made their way to the tanks and set them on fire.

The courageous men of Antroshchenkov's subunit returned along a road illuminated by the bright flames of burning gasoline.

12 July. A man was brought in to the command post. He was detained by the guards at the edge of the forest in which our camp was located. He was a tall, elderly man with a pince-nez, a severe, concentrated face and

an umbrella in his hand. From his appearance he was a communications worker. He was dressed in a uniform blouse with "lightning" on his left sleeve. However the man caused us to be suspicious, and he had no documents at all.

"Who are you?"

"A telegraph technician from the city."

"How did you get here to us?"

"I came to tell you... There are Germans where we are, but not in the city itself, but in a military garrison in barracks. It is a punitive detachment, only they are afraid to go farther and have been sitting there for three days already. During all this time they have been pilfering the stores and robbing the apartments. They have shot people on the square. One of our telephone operators was killed by them. They are looking for you, the Soviet soldiers."

"Is your telegraph office occupied?"

"Yes, by the Hitlerites."

...The detachment commander made a decision: they were hunting us, but we would find them. They had to be punished. Just let it get a bit more dark!

A daring plan was worked out. It was planned to make a raid on the garrison, spread panic, do a lot of damage, pick up some provisions and leave. It was not the first time that Levashev's airborne detachment had done some such thing. "And later it wouldn't hurt to practice street fighting a bit," said Capt Tsvion, the organizer and instructor of all the more difficult and important detachment raids.

...Dusk. We leave our home in the forest camp. Sr Lt G. S. Yakovlev's company with its two attached guns is the detachment vanguard. A dense grove on a high elevation near the city was chosen by scouts during the day. It was there that a firing position had been selected for the guns. The first and most important target were the four large three-story barracks filled with soldiers.

Night. After moving into the grove, Yakovlev prepared to open fire on the barracks after the entire detachment had arrived.

"Let's begin with the first story, then it will be miserable for the rest," he said to the gun commanders.

And then came the order: "Fire!"

The shells flew exactly into the lower windows of the barracks. There was the sound of explosions, walls crumbled, something exploded inside... Fire was shifted to other buildings of the military garrison. From everywhere

came the rumble of explosions and the crackle of fire. A battle broke out in the alleys. Several fascists who had come to their senses were trying to return the fire and throw grenades from behind a corner.

But the detachment commander's order is recalled: don't get bogged down in city tight spots or you become enangled and lose time. We must make our way to the center and strike at the nerves of the city — the telegraph and electric power station! The men rush on. The fascists themselves run away from the alleys. They want to get out of the city as they fear the populace.

Now, when the first parachutists have appeared on the streets, the inhabitants begin to come out of their homes and point out hiding reptiles.

Our special group headed by Selin ran to the telegraph office by the shortest route. With them went the old telegraphist.

"Where? Show us! Hurry..." the soldiers urged him, as they ran up to the office from an alley.

"There, the third window from the right!"

One after another, four grenades fly in through the window. The equipment room of the telegraph office blew up. The German guard placed on the main approach to the building no longer have anything to guard.

The job had been done. The airborne detachment provided itself with provisions and ammunition in the course of an hour. There was only one thing they didn't have time to do — count the dead Hitlerites.

In any case, there were over a hundred, while the parachutists lost only five killed and three wounded... The fascists could come to their senses at any moment. It's time to go!

18 July. Yesterday Kalachev left with his scouts. He was "on the hunt" the entire day. At 1800 hours his report arrived with scout Soroka:

"Mar'ina Gorka Station. A military train will arrive here at night to unload. It is possible that it is yesterday's punitive detachment. All know about Galitskiy, Levashev and us. They are ready to help, but secretly. The commandant here is an animal. I await orders. If we aren't going to have a go at the train, I'll at least finish off the commandant. Kalachev."

Soroka supplemented the report with other details: "The commandant is a mad dog. I myself saw how he shoots people and unmercifully beats our railroad workers, who were brought there to prepare the platform for the unloading."

Commander Zakutnyy makes his decision: to attend to the "unloading." But this must be done immediately or we will be late. The camp is struck and we head for the railroad crossing 5 kilometers away.

Soroka leads the detachment not to the station itself, but three kilometers from it, toward the German rear from which the trains are expected. It was decided to blow up the punitive train or derail it at this spot.

Levashev's detachment headed directly for the station so as to attack it as soon as the turmoil begins on the tracks. We as yet have had no experience at organizing railroad wrecks -- this will be the first. The detachment has moved into the depth of a woods. A special group of about ten men headed by the skilled grenade thrower Mayorov remained by the tracks.

In this spot the road passed through a cut. The soldiers sat on a knoll about seven meters above the level of the tracks. One could look down on the train from above. The men took three or four grenades apiece.

There was a buzzing and a clanking along the tracks from the rear.

"A section car," Mayorov, a former railroad repair worker, immediately determined. "Wait for the train behind it."

"We'll let it go by!"

Not one, but two armored section cars rushed by below us. Mayorov very much regretted that they had not been removed. But would the train suddenly be delayed? But it was coming full steam toward the front, quickly approaching the ambush site. The section cars were already at the station. They sent up a green flare to indicate the track was clear.

"The swine are exchanging words with a green one. We'll arrange a red one for them," says Mayorov, as he prepared to throw a grenade. "Aim at the smokestack and you'll land in the cab!" he shouts to the soldiers under the noise of the approaching train.

A sheaf of bright sparks from the locomotive smokestack shows where the grenades should be thrown.

"Fire!"

Ten bunches of grenades flew toward the locomotive. A terrible explosion rang out. The men were splashed with hot water and enveloped in steam.

"The boiler! That's great!" shouted Mayorov in muffled tones under the rumble of cars breaking up and climbing one atop the other.

"Let's get out of here!" he ordered, and the daredevils faded away in the darkness.

...During this time Levashev was operating at the station. They had not yet taken the station, but they had set up observation on the entry switches. In case the train should slip through they would overturn it on the switch. The explosion and rumble of the wreck served as the signal to attack the station...

The diary of Senior Political Officer Polyakov does not end here. Each page, each line tells of the courage, skill and heroism of the airborne troops of the 214th Airborne Brigade.

And what were the other corps units doing at this time?

The 4th Airborne Corps, which before the war was based in Belorussia near Minsk in the vicinity of Mar'ina Gorka, left the 214th Airborne Brigade to operate in the rear of the Hitlerite occupiers. With its main forces it waged delaying battles to the east of Minsk together with other troops in accordance with the order of the front commander. The airborne troopers fought particularly fierce battles on 3-7 July 1941 on the left bank of the Berezina together with units of the 20th Mechanized Corps, which had neither tanks nor motor vehicles.

On the morning of 4 July this corps, under the command of Maj Gen A. S. Zhadov, received the mission of counterattacking and throwing back into the river the Hitlerite units crossing the Berezina. However, due to heavy enemy machine gun and mortar fire and the action of enemy aviation, the corps units were not successful. Airborne troops of the 7th Airborne Brigade under command of Col M. F. Tikhonov fought with special heroism. After he was wounded on the Berezina on 4 July the brigade was taken by battalion commander V. A. Leshchinin.

Further attempts by our troops to destroy the enemy units which had broken through onto the left bank of the Berezina met with no success. It became evident that the Hitlerites were attempting to move to the Dnieper as quickly as possible and develop an offensive in the direction of Mogilev and Smolensk. Troops of the Thirteenth Army, including the 4th Airborne Corps, were given the mission of preventing a breakthrough of the enemy to Mogilev by means of stubborn defense. Corps units fought fierce defensive battles to the southwest of Mogilev. However by this time the corps had suffered considerable losses: the 7th Airborne Brigade had only 1,100 men and 15 guns of various calibers left. The 8th Airborne Brigade, commanded by Lt Col A. A. Onufriyev, had approximately the same strength.

On 8 July the 4th Airborne Corps was taken out of combat so as to be brought up to strength, but on 14 July it was already again committed to a defensive engagement. In the vicinity of Krichev corps units went into a stubborn defense together with the 55th Rifle Division of the Thirteenth Army, which was few in numbers. The 8th Brigade defended on the line Bakhrovka and mouth of the Sozh River. The 7th Brigade took up the defense along the east bank of the Sozh River opposite Krichev.

During the entire day of 16 July the enemy attempted to force the Sozh near Bakhrovka, but both on this and the following day the airborne troops beat off all attacks. However on 18 July after a heavy artillery and air raid the Hitlerites succeeded in forcing the Sozh by the end of the day and throwing back units of the 4th Airborne Corps to the region of Dubrovka and Klimovichi. The corps' neighbors were also beaten off the occupied positions.

The Commander-in-Chief of the Western Axis issued a categorical order to restore the situation in the vicinity of Krichev. Responsibility for this mission was placed on the Commander of the 4th Airborne Corps through the Commander of Thirteenth Army. The Front had no other forces in this area.

On the morning of 19 July the corps units moved to the initial position for the attack on Krichev, but everything didn't go as planned. Since they didn't have artillery or air support the airborne troops were not able to fulfill the assigned mission and, after suffering heavy losses, they were forced to withdraw behind the line Krasnyy Bor, Mikheyevichi, and Velikan, where they began to put themselves in order and prepare for a new counter-attack.

A repeat attack also was unsuccessful. Since the 8th Brigade was late in moving to the battle area due to difficult terrain it was not able to take part and toward the end of the day it concentrated in Zagustino.

During the day of 20 July units of the 4th Airborne Corps continued to act with the goal of destroying the enemy on the left bank of the Sozh in the vicinity of Krichev. The 8th Brigade fought to destroy groups of the enemy which had broken through and was not able to take part in the battle. By the end of the day it reached the grove northwest of Palitskaya so as to move to the area of combat operations on the night of 20/21 July and be in readiness for the attack on the morning of 21 July. The 7th Brigade operated rather successfully on this day. By 1500 hours it had taken the line Kovylkino, Trud Platform, and grove southeast of Mikheyevichi, but under the heavy artillery and machine gun fire from the vicinity of Mikheyevichi it was forced to withdraw to the line Velikan Platform, Gryazivets, east of Koreptsy, and grove north of Koreptsy, so as to bring itself into order and prepare for a new attack.

On the morning of 21 July units of the 4th Airborne Corps again attacked the enemy in the direction of Krichev. The 7th Brigade reached Korenaya and the woods to the west, where it was halted by enemy fire from the direction of Mikheyevichi. After reaching the woods east of Pondokhovo, the 8th Brigade was also stopped by concentrated enemy artillery and mortar fire.

The fierce battles for Krichev continued for several more days. On the evening of 29 July a composite group of airborne troops under the command of Maj V. S. Timchenko, Chief of Operations Division of the Headquarters of the 4th Airborne Corps, forced the Sozh and broke into the city in spite of very heavy enemy fire. A fierce battle was waged through the night with the Hitlerites in the vicinity of the railroad station, near the military commissariat, and in the villages of Voronevo and Zadobrost', which adjoined the city. Two enemy battalions were almost totally destroyed. Only individual soldiers managed to get out of the city. The airborne troops burned 12 tanks, many vehicles, and other enemy combat equipment. However at daybreak the fascists came to their senses and threw considerable forces of infantry and tanks into the counterattack. The airborne troops were forced to abandon the city. Maj V. S. Timchenko was fatally wounded in the battle for Krichev.

Many airborne soldiers distinguished themselves in the July battles in Belorussia. They will always remember the heroic actions of troops under the leadership of Captains N. A. Pridachin, I. I. Chepurnyy, A. G. Kobets, and N. I. Samarin, Sr Battalion Commissar V. A. Nikitin, Sr Political Officer D. F. Gavrish, Artillery Battalion Commander Capt B. L. Khirin, and others.

On 5 July, in repulsing an attack by tanks in the vicinity of Malyye Belynichi, Capt B. L. Khirin took over for a wounded gunner and destroyed four tanks and beat off an infantry attack. He displayed an example of heroism, courage, and valor in fulfilling to the end his military obligation to the Motherland. Capt B. L. Khirin was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

The Museum of Combat Glory in Krichev preserves many of the famous names of airborne heroes who gave their lives in battles for the Belorussian soil in the first difficult days of the Great Patriotic War.

Mar SU A. I. Yeremenko, who at that time commanded the Western Front, made the following evaluation of the actions of just the 7th Brigade of this Corps: "The Brigade fought heroically. Although its commander, Col Tikhonov, was seriously wounded in the leg, he did not leave the battlefield and continued to command the Brigade."¹

Subsequently, in connection with the changed situation at the front, the 4th Airborne Corps by order of the Front Commander began to fight in the direction of Unecha to carry out its new mission. Later it was moved from the army in the field into the deep rear of the country.

In The Ukraine

On 10 July 1941 the 3rd Airborne Corps was moved from the vicinity of Odessa to the vicinity of Kiev and was made part of the army in the field. The first trainloads of airborne troops began to unload at the Borispol' station on 13 July. A day later corps units already were beginning company exercises in the forest on the left bank of the Dnieper, in the vicinity of Brovary, Darnitsa, and Borispol'.

But the airborne troops did not have long to engage in peaceful training. At the end of July fascist troops moved onto the approaches to the capital of the Ukraine. Whoever was in Kiev in those days will never forget the barricades on the Kreshchatik, store windows heaped with sandbags, the long twisting trench dug by schoolchildren on Shevchenko Boulevard, or the anti-tank obstacles on the outskirts of the city.

Every day enemy planes made raids on plants and tried to break through to the crossings over the Dnieper. Troops moved endlessly along the streets.

¹A. I. Yeremenko, V nachale voyny (At the Beginning of the War), pp. 112-113.

Battalions of people's militia marched along singing. Day and night at the railroad stations everything that could be shipped to the east was being loaded.

During the first ten days of August the fascists broke through to the outskirts of the city. They occupied Golosiyevo. Soviet Army units and people's groups beat off one attack after another, but the sides were too unequal. Enemy submachine gunners penetrated into the trolley-bus depot and Golosiyevo Forest, dug in on the airfield and cemetery, and occupied individual houses in the southern and southwestern edge of the city. The artillery bombardment and machine gun bursts became more audible from Zhitomir Highway, where our troops, worn out by many days of bloody battles, were trying to delay the enemy until the approach of reinforcements and not permit him to take the city.

The 5th, 6th, and 212th airborne brigades of the 3rd Airborne Corps commanded by Maj Gen V. A. Glazunov were committed at this most critical moment in the battle. The corps' combat mission was to clear the suburbs of Kiev of the fascists and throw them from the walls of the city in coordination with other units.

The Corps went into the battle by brigades. On 6 August the 6th Airborne Brigade of Col V. G. Zholudev came into contact with the enemy in the latter half of the day. By the end of the day one battalion of the 212th Airborne Brigade had begun combat operations. The main forces of this Brigade, commanded by Col I. I. Zatevakhin, entered combat on the following morning. The 1st and 4th battalions of the 5th Airborne Brigade commanded by Hero of the Soviet Union Col A. I. Rodimtsev attacked the Germans on the evening of 7 August. Within 24 hours the remaining forces of the Brigade joined these battalions.

Stubborn battles were being waged on the southern edge of the city, where the airborne troops had taken up positions. The units defending the city beat off several attacks each day.

It became known in the Corps' Political Division that Hitler had issued an order on 8 August to take Kiev and hold a parade of German troops on the city's central street — the Kreshchatik. The Corps Commissar, Regimental Commissar D. T. Matveyev, and political workers told the troops of this scheme of the fascists. The men took an oath to die but not let the fascist cutthroats into Kiev.

On the morning of 8 August columns of German troops moved toward the city in approach march formations. First to meet them were airborne artillery troops of the howitzer regiment.

Day and night there were stubborn and bloody battles for the city. With absolute superiority in men and equipment, the Hitlerites attacked our positions six to eight times a day.

At a critical moment in the battle, when the fascists had succeeded in penetrating into the headquarters area of the 6th Airborne Brigade, Col Zholudev personally led a counterattack by officers of the brigade staff and political division and headquarters subunits.

Enemy infantry supported by armored vehicles broke through our defense in the sector of the 6th Airborne Brigade. The Commander of the 1st Battalion Capt Galanov and Battalion Commissar Sr Political Officer Spivak took charge of everyone in the battalion headquarters and the battalion second echelon -- Sr Lt Chervonnyy's company -- and decisively counterattacked and overran the enemy. Political Officer Spivak was killed and Capt Galanov seriously wounded in the battle. Battalion Chief of Staff Capt G. B. Smolin took command and led the soldiers into the attack. The fight was hard. The airborne troops fought with butts, bayonets, and grenades. Enemy submachine gunners did not stand up under the headlong blow and rolled back to their initial positions, leaving the dead and wounded.

Company Commander Sr Lt Chervonnyy and Battalion Doctor Capt Med Serv Galkin particularly distinguished themselves in the course of this battle. Surrounded on all sides, they beat off the pressing Hitlerites till the last cartridge and both met a brave death in the uneven battle with the enemy. The wounded commander of the sapper platoon, Lt Nikolay Parshin, commanded his subunit until the end of the battle.

On the night of 7/8 August the 1st and 4th battalions of the 5th Airborne Brigade were committed to battle in the southwestern outskirts of the city. The Commander of the 1st Battalion, Capt I. K. Simkin, was wounded during an attack on an enemy position on the north edge of Golosiyevo Forest. Then Sr Political Officer D. P. Popov led the attack. He sent a group of men headed by Sgt Nikolay Biryukov to go around while he attacked the enemy from the front with the main forces. The battle lasted around one hour. The enemy did not withstand the onslaught of the airborne troops and withdrew after losing almost half of his personnel and equipment. The important position was occupied and firmly held.

Sgt Nikolay Biryukov personally destroyed 12 Hitlerites in this battle. Others who distinguished themselves were Political Officer Maneshin, Jr Political Officer Sinitsyn, and Lt Shaposhnikov. They each headed a group of soldiers and personally led them into the attack.

The 1st Battalion was given a new mission -- to take the village of Myshelevka, but it had already suffered heavy losses. Of 300 men there were not over 50 who were left to fight.

The Hitlerites, who were well dug in in the village, ceased their fire. The battalion began to bring its depleted subunits in order. What was to be done further? Communications with the brigade headquarters had been lost and almost nothing remained of the battalion, but an order was an order -- the village had to be taken. So the 50 airborne troopers, armed only with rifles and grenades, threw themselves into a night attack. Caught by surprise,

the fascists decided that they were being attacked by a major unit. They abandoned Myshelovka in panic, leaving equipment, ammunition and various supplies.

The battered enemy units ceased their attacks and on 11 August began active reconnaissance. Enemy scout planes hung over the airborne positions from morning to night. It was obvious that the enemy was preparing to hit another sector. Soon information was received in the corps headquarters that the Hitlerites were preparing an attack from the direction of the Vasil'kov -- Kiev Highway.

Col A. I. Rodimtsev, Commander of the 5th Airborne Brigade, decided to reinforce the defense on this sector with men of the Brigade School for Junior Commanders and with antitank weapons. Brigade Chief of Staff Maj V. A. Borisov and Chief of the School Sr Lt G. Ya. Mikhaylov made skillful use of the natural terrain obstacles and did a good job of organizing the fire system on their sector of the defense.

The Brigade Commander later wrote about how the School cadets conducted themselves in combat: "...after a brief but heavy fire concentration, tanks with parties of submachine gunners on board appeared from the edge of the woods. The Hitlerite tanks rushed at high speed toward the forward line of our defense, firing on the move. There were especially large numbers of tanks attacking the sector where the cadets were dug in.

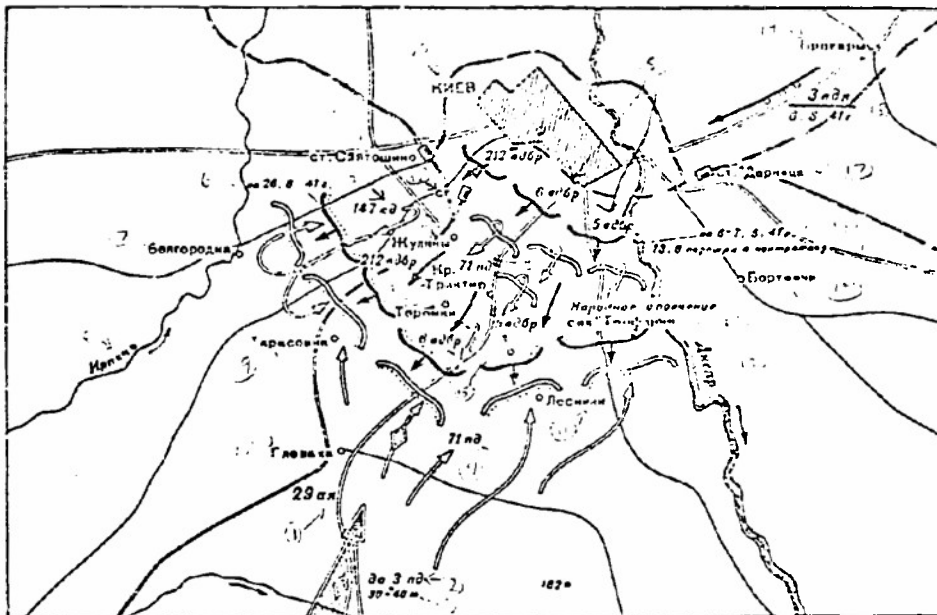
I attentively observed the movement of the tanks, which soon had approached quite closely and were continuing to fire upon our positions. There was no answering fire. 'What's the matter?' I thought. 'This is the right time to put the guns in play. Why were they delaying?'

'Call "Volna," I told the telephone operator, and then, already being seriously worried, I again began to observe what was happening. But it was not necessary to talk with 'Volna,' where Chief of Staff Borisov was located.

The defense of our School came alive. Machine guns and submachine guns began to bark and the cannon roared, wiping the fascists from the armor with a sea of fire. The artillerymen fired point-blank at the tanks. First one, then a second, then a third tank froze in place. Their crews attempted to save themselves by leaving the tanks. Soon seven more armored vehicles burst into flame. The attack bogged down before my eyes."¹

Many school cadets and commanders distinguished themselves in this battle. They passed the first battle -- the first examination -- with honor. Many of them were later awarded orders and medals. Jr Political Officer S. N. Rzhuchuk, who displayed particular courage and bravery in this battle, was awarded the Order of Lenin. The Chief of the School, Sr Lt G. Ya. Mikhaylov, was awarded the Order of the Red Banner.

¹I. A. Samchuk, 13-ya gvardeyskaya (Thirteenth Guards). Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1962, p. 15.



Combat operations of the 3rd Airborne Corps in the southern outskirts of Kiev in August 1941

KEY: 1. ak [armeyskiy korpus; army corps]; 2. up to three pd [pekhotnaya diviziya; infantry division]; 3. 30-40 tanks; 4. pd; 5. vdbr [vozdushnodesantnaya brigada; airborne brigade]; 6. as of 28 August 1941; 7. Belgorodka; 8. Irpen' River; 9. Tarasovka; 10. Glovakha; 11. Lesniki; 12. Dnieper River; 13. People's militia of Teofaniya Sovkhoz; 14. Bortnich; 15. as of 6-7 August 1941; 16. counterattacked on 13 August; 17. Darnitsa Station; 18. vdk [vozdushnodesantnyy korpus; airborne corps]; 19. Brovary; 20. Kiev; 21. Svyatoshino Station; 22. st. [stantsiya; station]; 23. sd [strelkovaya diviziya; rifle division]; 24. Zhulyany; 25. Krasnyy Traktir; 26. Toromki.

After successfully repulsing all enemy attacks and inflicting heavy losses, the 3rd Airborne Corps received the mission of completing the rout of units of the 71st German Infantry Division and clearing the enemy from Zhulyany, Krasnyy Traktir, and Golosiyev Forest. On the morning of 13 August there began an artillery preparation which continued over a half hour. When three red flares rose over the combat formations of the brigades, the troops rose out of their trenches in a united rush and dashed headlong upon the enemy.

Twilight was already falling, but the battle still went on. The airborne troops moved stubbornly forward, throwing the enemy from the positions he occupied. With a snarl the enemy brought mortar and artillery fire on the advancing troops. Air strikes were delivered also. However the offensive passion of the soldiers was so great that no one was able to halt them. Smashing the retreating Hitlerites, corps units rushed into the village of Zhulyany. In the course of subsequent battles the airborne troops seized Ilyushiny Dvory, Myshelovka, Golosiyevy, and a number of populated points adjacent to them.

And what patriotism was displayed by these people in the defense of Kiev! The wounded hurriedly bound their own wounds and continued the path to the west, fearing that they would lag behind the foremost subunits. They went boldly, knowing no obstacles, knowing that with each step and each blow they were inflicting irreplaceable losses on the enemy and cleaning the Soviet soil of fascist scum.

The heroic exploit of Capt Klimov, Commander of the 1st Battalion of the 212th Airborne Brigade, will remain an eternal memory. He didn't leave the first wave of the battalions for even an hour. Although wounded and bleeding, he fought to his last breath. The citizens of Kiev bestowed the Red Banner on his battalion, the heroism and steadfastness of which was known to all in the capital of the Ukraine. It proudly waved over the combat formations of the airborne troops and inspired them to new exploits.

The airborne troops performed many heroic deeds in the defense of Kiev. The names of the best of them have not left the pages of Army and Republic newspapers.

The smashed enemy units clutched at each favorable position and offered violent resistance. Finally the persistence of the fascists was broken and they were thrown out of Kiev for a distance of 15-20 kilometers.

The airborne troops attacked! When?! In August of 1941. They moved forward as they fought for 15-20 kilometers... In August! Whoever was on the front in those days will understand what it meant at that time not to defend, not to retreat, but to attack toward the west! Almost until the end of August the airborne troops together with units of the 147th Rifle Division held the captured positions, covering Kiev from the southwest.

Here is what is related in the recollections of a former officer of the 5th Airborne Brigade. He is now a Lt Col (Res), Academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukraine, and Honored Scientist. His name is M. Pasichnik, and he tells of the battles at Kiev in those August days of 1941.

"A quarter of a century has passed since the time when the Hitlerites were stopped near the walls of ancient Kiev. The defenders of the city will never be able to forget the severe combat existence of 1941. Memories of the Golosiyevy days and nights are especially dear to us airborne troopers. At the beginning of August fascist units penetrated into the southern outskirts of the city and occupied the building of the Agricultural Institute

(now the Ukrainian Academy of Agriculture). The Hitlerites shouted to the entire world that a parade of German troops had taken place in Kiev on 8 August.

But on the night of 8/9 August units of the 3rd Airborne Corps, which also included our 5th Brigade, stopped the Hitlerites in a fierce battle and disrupted their plans for unexpectedly capturing the city.

The Germans suffered heavy losses and were forced to take to the defense. They turned the Institute building into a fortified strong point.

Our Brigade was commanded at that time by a Hero of the Soviet Union who already had experience in fighting the fascists near the walls of Madrid, — Aleksandr Il'ich Rodimtsev. In fierce fighting the airborne troops knocked the fascists out of Myshelovka, Khotov, and other populated points."¹

However the fascist German command did not give up the idea of capturing Kiev and hastily prepared for new offensive actions. After they encountered the stubborn resistance of the defenders of the Ukrainian capital they were forced to employ a deep envelopment to capture Kiev — the Panzer divisions of Guderian were turned to the south. A threat also arose for Kiev from the northeast, from the direction of the Desna River and its tributaries. The enemy forced the Desna here in the vicinity of the city of Oster.

The Commander of the Southwestern Front Col Gen M. P. Kirponos ordered the Commander of the 3rd Airborne Corps Maj Gen V. A. Glazunov to detach a portion of his forces to destroy the enemy in the vicinity of Oster. The choice fell on one of the best brigades — the 212th. The Brigade Commander Col I. I. Zatevakhin decided to strike the enemy by surprise and simultaneously with all the Brigade's forces and throw him back onto the right bank of the Desna. Troopers of the 212th Brigade carried out this mission with honor. In a brief fight they inflicted defeat on the fascist German units and threw them beyond the water barrier.

At the end of August the 3rd Airborne Corps was made a part of Fortieth Army and for 45 days waged fierce battles at Komotop for the city of Tim in Kurskaya Oblast. Before these battles began the 3rd Airborne Corps was reorganized into the 87th Rifle Division, and after the liberation of Tim this Division was given the designation of 13th Guards. Later on the 13th Guards Rifle Division under the command of Maj Gen A. I. Rodimtsev was especially distinguished in the Battle of the Volga. Later on the Guardsmen liberated the cities of the Ukraine, Romania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. They forced the Vistula and the Oder, took Chenstokhov, Wrocław, and Dresden, and participated in the liberation of Prague. The Division was one of the first to move to the Elbe in the vicinity of Torgau. Thousands of soldiers were awarded orders and medals, and 14 Guardsmen were given the title of

¹Vecherniy Kiev (Evening Kiev), 9 August 1966, No. 187.

Hero of the Soviet Union. The Division itself began to be called the Poltava Order of Lenin Twice Red Banner Orders of Suvorov and Kutuzov Division.

After the battles at Kiev Maj Gen V. A. Glazunov was designated Commander of Airborne Forces and held that job for around two years. Later, on his personal request, he was given command of the 4th Guards Rifle Corps of Eighth Guards Army in November 1943. He ended the war as a Lt Gen and twice Hero of the Soviet Union.

Not Far From Moscow

As we know, the plan of the Hitler command for the offensive operation bearing the code name "Taifun" intended destruction of Soviet troops on the Vyaz'ma-Moscow and Bryansk-Moscow Axes, and after envelopment of Moscow from the north and south, to capture it in the shortest possible time. According to the Hitlerites, Operation "Taifun" was to be developed like a hurricane on the distant approaches to Moscow and was to lead to a lightning-like destruction of Soviet forces.

Beginning of the operation against the Western Front was planned for 2 October, and on 30 September the enemy struck against forces of the Bryansk Front. Fierce fighting broke out. The enemy overcame our defenses and threw his main body against Orel and Tula and a portion of his forces against Karachev and Bryansk.

In order to delay the enemy on the Orel-Tula Axis, the High Command General Headquarters sent the 1st Guards Rifle Corps and two tank brigades under the command of Maj Gen D. D. Lelyushenko from its reserve to the vicinity of Mtsensk. However events developed so swiftly that it was impossible to accomplish a majority of the measures undertaken by General Headquarters. By the end of 2 October the Hitlerite forces had moved onto the distant approaches to Orel, and on the second half of the next day enemy tanks exploited the success on the axis of the main blow and burst into Orel.

After seizing Orel advance units of the 24th Panzer Corps continued to advance along the Orel-Tula Highway.

At the same time that it moved the 1st Guards Rifle Corps to the vicinity of Mtsensk, the General Headquarters made the decision to urgently move the 5th Airborne Corps by air to this vicinity.¹

At that time Col S. S. Gur'yev commanded the 5th Airborne Corps. In the first days of the war airborne troops of the 10th and 201st Airborne Brigades received much combat experience by covering the Riga-Dvina Axis under very difficult circumstances. The oldest airborne brigade in the Soviet Army, the 201st imeni S. M. Kirov, particularly distinguished itself.

¹IML /Institut marksizma-leninizma; Institute of Marxism-Leninism/ Archives, Dokumenty i materialy istorii Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny (Documents and Materials on the History of the Great Patriotic War), inventory No. 9480, listy 410, 415.

The commander it had for a long while was one of the organizers of airborne forces — Maj Gen I. S. Bezuglyy.

A small air transport group of 80 FS-34 and TB-3 aircraft was used to move the 10th and 201st brigades of the 5th Airborne Corps. On 3 October the entire group was concentrated on an airfield and on that same day it began work. Over 6,000 men with two fire units of ammunition, weapons, and equipment had to be moved in a short time.

All troops were landed during the period of 3 October and the first half of 4 October within 18 hours. Each crew had to make 3-4 trips.

Troops of the 201st Airborne Brigade were the first ones on the route of movement of Guderian's Panzer units between Orel and Mtsensk. Using a mobile defense, they were to delay the Hitlerites and provide time for the troops of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps of Gen D. D. Lelyushenko to mass in the vicinity of Mtsensk. First to arrive in Mtsensk at the end of the day on 4 October was the 4th Tank Brigade of Col M. Ye. Katukov, which entered combat on the move in support of the airborne troops.

Toward evening of the next day units of the 6th Guards Rifle Division and the 11th Tank Brigade had completed unloading. Neither Gen Bezuglyy, who was directing the landing, nor Col Gur'yev had exact information as to the situation in the vicinity of Orel on the morning of 3 October, but as we know, advance enemy units had entered the city on this day.

One of the battalions of the 201st Airborne Brigade was landing on the airfield in Orel at a time when it was in the zone of artillery fire. Structures, hangars, and fuel dumps were on fire, shells were bursting across the entire field, and clouds of dense smoke hung in the air. Nevertheless, more and more heavy airships appeared over the airfield, boldly coming in for a landing. Troops of the first echelon, who were fighting the approaching forward enemy units, anxiously watched as the aircraft landed.

Several aircraft which had already unloaded and were ready for take-off were damaged by shrapnel at the last possible moment. Some of them were burning, and their crews were forced to transfer to other aircraft after removing weapons and valuable instruments. Immediately after disembarking from the aircraft, the airborne troops left the airfield and hurried to aid their first echelon on the northwest outskirts of Orel, where the fighting flared ever stronger.

The Brigade's 3rd Battalion landed 8 kilometers northeast of Orel on the Optukha Airfield. The Battalion unloaded under more or less normal circumstances, and the troops hurried to cut off the Orel-Mtsensk Highway on the line Optukha and Ivanovskaya. On 4 October they stubbornly held this position, and on the morning of the following day Katukov's tankers came up to them.

On 3 October and the first half of 4 October all other units of the 5th Airborne Corps were landed in the vicinity of Mtsensk. During the landing they were subjected to continuous raids by enemy aviation.

Battalion Commissar N. A. Shevyakov was a participant in the battles at Mtsensk and tells how combat events unfolded in those days.

...Silently and without bustle, the subunits disembarked. Col S. M. Kovalev gave precise instructions on the move. The companies went into battle formations and hurriedly left for the west. The terrain relief did not favor the defense. An enormous, gentle slope merged into the river bank, forming an empty sand bank. It was only far off, beyond the bend of the Oka, that the dense forest rose in an impenetrable wall. But the enemy was already there.

The artillery fire did not let up for a minute, and the soldiers hurried to dig in. With each minute the trenches became deeper, and soon a breastwork became clearly delineated on the surface. When the work was almost over several tanks appeared on the edge of the woods. They cautiously approached the river, touched the water with their treads, and returned from whence they had come.

"They are looking for a ford," surmised the men. Someone began to tie grenades together, and the rest followed his example.

The parachutists prepared for a hard fight: some loaded spare ammunition drums, others checked their machine guns, while still others placed armor-piercing cartridges closer together. The impending battle was felt stronger and stronger every minute. Soon it began...

Shells fell upon the airborne troops' positions, shrapnel burst in the air with a clatter, machine guns barked from the forest. The whistle of what were previously solitary bullets now merged together. Soon tanks appeared. How many? Many were trying to answer this question, and soon the answer came: 48.

"We have to hold out. The tanks might get through, but we won't retreat," said Lt N. V. Bondarev as he gave the mission to his company.

The airborne troops measured the distance to the tanks, picking a convenient moment to throw grenades. Now the tanks were already within 40 meters.

"Against the fascist tanks -- fire!" rang out the voice of Lt Bondarev. The grenades flew against the armor, branded with the spider-like swastika. They burst under the treads and near the tanks, covering the fascist vehicles with a dense network of fragments. The submachine gunners opened fire against the vision slits. But the armored avalanche continued to move forward. Ten tanks halted and began to fire upon the defenses with guns and machine guns. The treads had already crushed the first line of trenches, but the men remained in place. Two tanks moved against Lt Bondarev's trench at the same time. He rose to his full height and threw two bundles of grenades one after the other. A tread was knocked off the first tank, but the second increased its speed and headed directly for the trench.

Bondarev grabbed a third bundle and threw himself under the tank. The officer and Party member died the death of a hero, but he didn't give an inch.

The avalanche moved farther. In front and in back of it rumbled the explosions, throwing fountains of earth to all sides. The battle raged to the entire depth of the defense. It even continued after the tanks had passed. Our airborne troops were deficient in antitank guns and other combat means, but they possessed a steel will for victory, a will which the enemy's vaunted technology couldn't break...

On 5 and 6 October the 3rd Battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade, together with tankers of the 4th Tank Brigade, withdrew to the line of villages Naryshkino, Voin, and Slobodka and successfully repulsed an attack by the Hitlerites.

By the morning of 7 October, employing a mobile defense and using tank ambushes, units of two corps (1st Guards Rifle and 5th Airborne) took up a defense on a new line Golovlevo, Sheino. The 201st Airborne Brigade intercepted the highway. To the left was a regiment of border troops with a tank battalion of the 11th Tank Brigade on their flank. On the right wing, which was the most dangerous, the 4th Tank Brigade was set up in an ambush in the vicinity of Glazunovo. The main line of defense on the Zusha River was occupied by units of the 6th Guards Rifle Division and the 10th Airborne Brigade of the 5th Airborne Corps.

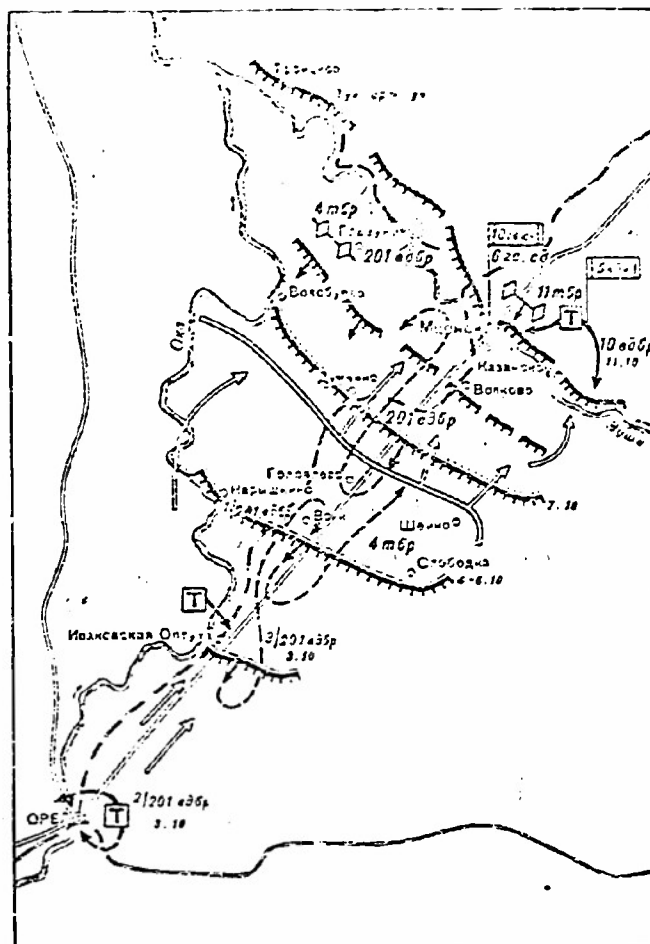
During the latter half of the day the enemy delivered a heavy bombing strike against our defense, and right after that the tanks advanced wave after wave.

The airborne, border and tank troops met the enemy with heavy fire. The battlefield was aflame with 39 German tanks. The enemy was halted. One of the parachute rifle companies destroyed 15 tanks with its two supporting 45-mm guns, bundles of hand grenades, and Molotov cocktails.

The fierce fighting continued on subsequent days as well. At the end of the day on 10 October the Hitlerites committed new Panzer units, penetrated the forward position, struck the left flank where the border troops were defending, and entered the outskirts of Mtsensk. A fierce battle broke out for the only crossing over the Zusha. In spite of the stubborn defense of the 6th Guards Rifle Division, the Hitlerites succeeded in taking the crossing at the cost of enormous losses.

An extremely difficult situation was created for the units defending the forward position — the 4th Tank Brigade and the border and airborne troops. They were in a semicirclement and were fighting superior enemy forces almost in isolation.

On the night of 10/11 October all our units succeeded in crossing the river with great difficulty over a damaged railroad bridge under constant enemy fire. The airborne troops were the last to cross, as they were



Combat operations by units of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps and the 5th Airborne Corps from 3 through 11 October 1941

KEY: 1. Orel; 2. vdbr [vozdushnodesantnaya brigada; airborne brigade]; 3. Ivanovskaya Optukha; 4. armored forces; 5. Oka River; 6. Nar'yshkino; 7. Golovlevo; 8. Voin; 9. Sheino; 10. tbr [tankovaya brigada; tank brigade]; 11. Slobodka; 12. Dumchino; 13. Volobuyevo; 14. Troitskoye; 15. 1st Ul'yanovsk Artillery School; 16. Glazunovo; 17. gvsk [gvardeyskiy strelkovyy korpus; Guards rifle corps]; 18. gvsd [gvardeyskaya strelkovaya diviziya; Guards rifle division]; 19. Mtsensk; 20. Volkovo; 21. Kazanskoye; 22. vdk [vozdushnodesantnyy korpus; airborne corps]; 23. Zusha River.

covering the withdrawal. "...Kovalev's airborne troops came right after the 132nd Border Regiment, maintaining their calmness and order as if they were on a tactical exercise...

In the night the tank, border, and airborne troops successfully linked up with the main body of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps on the east bank of the Zusha, leaving the enemy nothing."¹

On this same night, after regrouping men and material, the troops of Gen Lelyushenko's group went into a counterattack and by the morning of 11 October had beaten the Hitlerites out of Mtsensk.

After having halted the enemy on the Zusha, our troops hurried to gain contact with him so as not to give the Hitlerites rest day or night. The airborne troops showed themselves to be masters of night reconnaissance and diversionary raids.

The command urgently needed a "tongue" which could tell of the strength and intentions of the enemy. Such a "tongue" could only be an officer who had a good knowledge of the situation and plans of his headquarters. The mission of obtaining a "tongue" was assigned to the parachute scouts of Sr Lt S. A. Cherenkov.

The night was dark, with neither moon nor stars. A cold autumn rain fell to earth monotonously and flowed in rivulets to the low spots. They took to the ravines. The scouts walked silently, at times stepping into puddles or stumbling on bushes or hummocks. No one broke the stillness of this dark October night. Soon the line of defense was behind them. The men's watchfulness became even greater. Filtering between hills and populated points occupied by Hitlerites, the scouts moved into their deep rear and halted in a small village. It turned out to be only partially occupied by the enemy, so they decided to await the morning here. They determined that the headquarters of one of the German units was located in a neighboring village one kilometer away. This suited them. In addition, the numerous ravines which stretched to the front lines facilitated accomplishment of the mission.

They situated themselves in two outlying houses from which the adjacent village was easily seen. They set up observation and tensely awaited the morning.

The rain did not let up. The airborne troops did not sleep -- everything was too daring and dangerous.

Toward daybreak the rain ended, and the sky began to clear. The observers looked intently at the next village. At that time one of the posts reported a wagon and people.

¹D. D. Lelyushenko, Zarya pobedy (Dawn of Victory), Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1966, p. 52.

Sr Lt S. A. Cherenkov saw from his post how a wagon, sliding along the washed-out road, was going down into a ravine. He immediately ordered an ambush to be set up. The men all stealthily but hurriedly left the houses and rushed to the ravine through gardens. The wagon was already moving along the ravine. Six guards went ahead, and there were four officers sitting on the wagon and laughing loudly. They had no idea that here in their own den there could be an ambush, and were surprised at the unexpected appearance of the Russians. First of all the Hitlerites noticed a group which cut off their route of movement. It was a small group — four men headed by a Sgt. The officers jumped from the wagon, shouting "Surrender, Russians!" But in answer the Sgt unleashed a long burst at the German soldiers from his submachine gun. This was a signal for the other airborne troops. Four fascists fell dead in the mud. Two soldiers and one officer tried to run, but the accurate rounds of the troops cut them off. The three officers who had suggested surrender stood with raised hands.

Late at night Sr Lt Cherenkov reported fulfillment of the mission. They had delivered three fully informed "tongues," staff documents, two radios, and other property, along with the wagon...

For nine days the parachutists, border troops, tankers, and soldiers of the 1st Guards Rifle Corps fought on the fields of Orlovskaya Oblast, exhausting the units of Guderian in a mobile defense. The enemy was halted on the Zusha, and it was insurmountable for him up to 24 October. By this time units of Fiftieth Army of the Bryansk Front had basically completed their withdrawal to the vicinity of Tula and the necessary regrouping of troops had been accomplished on the left wing of the Western Front with the goal of covering the Bryansk-Moscow Axis.

Thus the 24th Motorized Corps of Guderian's Second Panzer Army was only able to cover the 25-50 kilometers separating Orel from Mtsensk in 9 days with heavy losses! The rapid advance planned by the Hitlerites on Tula did not come about.

Subsequently Gen Guderian admitted that his Army suffered heavy losses in armor at Mtsensk. The Germans formed a special commission to investigate the reasons for the defeat of the 24th Motorized Corps at Mtsensk.¹

In spite of the fact that the battles at Mtsensk were not yet over and there remained the danger of the capture of Tula, the command of the Western Front decided to take units of the 5th Airborne Corps out of combat on 17 October and move them by rail and motor vehicles into a new area. At this time a particularly difficult situation existed on the Maloyaroslavets Axis. The airborne troops massed in the area southwest of the city of Podol'sk and became part of Forty-Third Army. They were again committed on 20 October 1941.

¹See Zh. Bushe, Bronetankovoye oruzhiye v voyne (Armored Weapons in Warfare), Moscow, Foreign Literature Publishing House, 1956, p. 227.

Forty-Third Army had the mission of holding the Maloyaroslavets to Podol'sk Highway and prevent the enemy from approaching Moscow from the southwest.

The 201st was the lead brigade of the 5th Airborne Corps in the move to Maloyaroslavets. It was the first to engage in a meeting engagement with the enemy grouping moving on Moscow. At this time the 201st Brigade was 18-20 kilometers from Maloyaroslavets. Fierce fighting broke out in a narrow sector of the terrain, chiefly along the Podol'sk Highway. The airborne troops used a mobile defense, operated from ambushes, and aimed to move to the flank and rear of the advancing enemy. The enemy was finally halted on the line of the Nara River, 46 kilometers southwest of Podol'sk. All enemy attempts to penetrate across this line were unsuccessful: the airborne troops stood here to the death until the middle of December -- the beginning of the counteroffensive by armies of the center of the Western Front.

The Commander of Forty-Third Army, Maj Gen K. D. Golubev, gave exceptionally high praise for the actions of the airborne troops in the defensive battle.

Here are several examples taken from the war diary of the 201st Airborne Brigade imeni S. M. Kirov.

23 October 1941. The six days which separated the airborne troops from the last battle at Mtsensk introduced much into their combat lives. They are now experienced, hardened soldiers.

For the third day now continuous fighting has been going on on the line at the village of Bukhalovka. On 21 October the Germans delivered a powerful blow against the defenses of the 201st Airborne brigade. It seemed that eardrums were bursting from the explosions of bombs, shells, and mines. Everything was covered with smoke and fire. Attacks from both sides were of a fierce nature and were undertaken several times a day. But the stronger was the pressure of the Hitlerites, the more violent was the resistance of the airborne troops. Battery Commander Jr Lt P. I. Karanov was wounded in the leg, but he remained with his battery and continued to command. After the battle 20 artillerymen of this battery put in a request to have confidence in them and accept them into the Party. Gunner Menyushkin wrote: "I would sooner die than retreat before the sworn enemy. I want to defend Moscow as a Party member."

During the two following days the new attacks by the Hitlerites were considerably weaker. The fighting went on somewhere on the left flank, at the junction with the adjacent unit. At the end of the day on 23 October three enemy tanks and around two companies of infantry suddenly appeared on the left flank of the firing positions after having gone around our infantry. The artillerymen did not get confused. They immediately opened fire and knocked out one tank on the spot and dispersed the enemy infantry. It was evident that the battery's fire was unexpected for the Germans too, and they withdrew into the forest.

With the onset of darkness an order was received to occupy a new and more favorable position of defense along the Nara River. The route to it lay along the highway through areas where the Germans had managed to set up ambushes.

Deep night fell. The vehicles and guns moved at a high speed, but they did not succeed in passing the places of enemy ambush without a fight. Under enemy fire, the artillerymen turned their guns and fired pointblank at the enemy. They moved in this manner all night in moving to friendly positions, suffering losses in men, fording the river and overcoming destroyed sections of road, but not leaving one gun or shell for the enemy.

It began to get light. The artillerymen occupied new positions beyond the Nara River...

...A depression extended to the river, bordered on all sides by a harmonious birch forest. It separated the airborne troops from the Hitlerites.

Early on a November morning, when the airborne troops, tired from night duty at the firing positions, were changing crews, the enemy opened a heavy fire against our forward line. The men were accustomed to the fact that the enemy daily engaged in brief but massive fire strikes, and after a certain time repeated them. But this time the artillery did not let up for a long time. After that the heavy machine guns opened up, and then the enemy infantry rose to the attack.

The Battalion Commander Sr Lt N. A. Kashchenko alerted everyone, but ordered them to be in no hurry to open fire. They let the Hitlerites get close to the forward line, and when several hundred meters remained, they opened a massed surprise fire from machine guns and submachine guns. The attack bogged down. A loud "Hurrah" sounded throughout the forest on the right flank. The airborne troops counterattacked. Machine gunners changed their firing positions, and the submachine gunners cut off the Hitlerites' route of retreat. The enemy did not withstand the coordinated pressure and began to retreat in disorder. By this time the submachine guns of the parachutists began to sound from the rear. The enemy was driven to the depression. The fascists made off across the open terrain, escaping by running off in groups and singly. They were cut down by the lead bursts of the machine guns and the accurate shots of the snipers.

In the heat of battle the battalion commissar, I. V. Kozlov, who was on the left flank, noticed the Hitlerites moving three guns to a firing position. They were trying to help out their infantry, who had fallen into a fire pocket, by means of artillery fire.

"For the Motherland, forward!" cried the Commissar, as he and a small group of men rushed the enemy battery. The attack was so unexpected that the artillerymen did not even have time to deploy the guns and were forced to run to escape.

The fight was brief but fierce — around a hundred dead Hitlerites remained in the depression, and a few were on the edge of the forest. Three guns and machine guns, submachine guns, and rifles were captured by the airborne troops. That was how firmly the Kirov troops defended.

When on 18 December 1941 troops of the center of the Western Front — Thirty-Third and Forty-Third armies — began a counteroffensive, airborne troops of the 5th Airborne Corps also took part in the attack on Maloyaroslavets as part of Forty-Third Army. During the defensive battles units of the corps had been reinforced with men and combat equipment, including artillery. And again fierce fighting broke out for the villages of Bukhalovka and Shemyakino and the settlement of Kolontay, and the position along the Luzha River.

The enemy furiously resisted and held on to Maloyaroslavets. In this sector the Hitlerite troops strengthened their defenses for around three months. All populated points of any major size were transformed into strong centers of resistance. Embrasures had been cut out in stone houses and barns and equipped for machine guns and artillery pieces. In some cases the enemy had additionally reinforced the walls of buildings facing our side. Approaches to the populated points could be swept with machine gun, mortar, and artillery fire. The airborne troops paralyzed the enemy from the front, then went around his strong points through snow-covered forests and swamps and struck blows from the rear. Without roads, and wallowing in snow drifts, they moved forward, pulling the guns and vehicles by hand. The temperature went to 30 degrees below, but the mission was successfully accomplished. The airborne troops took the populated points of Churikovo, Skripilovo, and Milichkino to the north of Maloyaroslavets and Panskoye and Terent'yev to the west, then entered the city's outskirts from the east and north. On 2 January 1942 the ancient Russian city of Maloyaroslavets was liberated by our troops.

In January 1942 units of the 5th Airborne Corps took part in the offensive of that month against Medyn', and later were removed from combat for reformation and to be brought up to strength.

The 10th and 201st airborne brigades of Cols S. M. Kovalev and S. N. Kireyev particularly distinguished themselves in the battles for Moscow. The airborne troops operated on the Moscow Axis for 4 months, waging fierce, stubborn fights against the Hitlerite aggressors, and sacrificing their blood and lives for the capital. The enemy could not penetrate to Moscow from the southwest. The Red Army began his destruction on the close approaches to the capital. Together with soldiers of other combat arms, the airborne troops halted the enemy and then threw him back from the capital.

The Soviet government had high praise for the services of personnel of the 5th Airborne Corps, as seen in the award of orders and medals of the USSR to many of the men. On 7 March 1942 they arrived in Moscow for the award of high honors.

Among those honored were Cols S. M. Kovalev and S. N. Kireyev, battalion commissars I. M. Ptitsyn, N. A. Shevyakov, I. V. Kozlov, and N. B.

Rodionov, Sr Political Officer V. M. Starykh, Sr Lts S. A. Cherenkov and N. A. Kashchenko, Lt A. M. Sergeyev, Sr Military Medical Technician V. A. Shcherba, Nurse M. V. Tatarenko, Sr Sgt V. A. Zuykov, Pfc A. A. Degtyar', Red Army man Shamil' Guseynov, and many others.

As they left the Kremlin, each of them gave a solemn vow in his heart to smash the Hitlerite occupiers even harder. Ahead were severe battles with a hated enemy, and they were ready...

On The Ugra

A difficult situation arose in the vicinity of Yukhnov at almost the same time as the events on the Orel-Mtsensk Axis, which saw the participation of airborne troops of the 10th and 201st airborne brigades of the 5th Airborne Corps. A good highway — the Warsaw Highway — went from here to Medyn', Maloyaroslavets, Podol'sk, and Moscow. It was just a little over 200 kilometers from Yukhnov to Moscow.

In August 1941 an airborne parachute detachment of the Western Front Air Force began to form in a camp near Yukhnov. Capt I. G. Starchak was assigned to head the detachment. As deputies he had Capt A. P. Kabachevskiy and Sr Political Officer N. Kh. Shcherbina, the latter being the Political Officer for the detachment. The detachment was formed from Komsomol members, who arrived on travel orders of the VLKSM Central Committee, and from soldiers of the Front's airfield units. In addition, there were several dozen well trained parachutists of the 214th Airborne Brigade. They essentially became instructors. The detachment totaled over 400 men.

The camp in which the future airborne parachutists were located was jokingly called Starchak's dacha. An intense Army life seethed here. The men learned to defend important objectives, to force the Ugra River on improvised materials, to storm its steep banks, and to fight tanks.

But the enemy was inexorably moving east, and by 4 October Starchak's detachment was taking up the defense of the Ugra and the crossing over it by the Warsaw Highway without awaiting specific instructions of the senior headquarters. This position was 205 kilometers from the capital. There was at this time no other unit there except for the airborne troops.

On 4 October 1941 Capt Starchak moved his detachment to the highway and pointed to a kilometer marker with the number "205": "That is the distance to Moscow. Without opposition, an enemy tank column would cover this distance in about 5-6 hours... If not we, then who will stop it?! Today is the same as 22 June for ever, one. We are border troops. We will defend Moscow here on the Ugra. Just that. For us Soviet parachutists there can be no other way."

And probably for many of the men the grand concept of Motherland was embodied in that narrow road leading to Moscow. The brown slope of the highway, hexagonal wooden road signs, damp black asphalt reflecting the

cold sun, even the newly dug trenches with water up to the knees -- all this was painfully theirs.



On the Ugra 4 October 1941; in the center is I. G. Starchak

The eastern bank of the Ugra, where the detachment took up the defense, commanded the terrain in front. This allowed them to set up quite a firm defense if they had antitank weapons, but unfortunately the airborne troops had no other means of fighting tanks except Molotov cocktails and grenades. The detachment's main strength was concentrated on a narrow section of the highway. On the morning of 5 October Starchak's men beat off the first onslaught of the enemy. In the course of the day they had to repulse several violent enemy attacks.

On that same day a small group of parachutists headed by Sr Lt P. Balashov made a dawn raid on an airfield, from which our pilots had not had time to move three TB-3 bombers. The troopers set fire to two of the aircraft and took off in the third. This one was flown by Balashov, who up until then had not once piloted a four-engine aircraft.

There were particularly fierce battles on 6 and 7 October. Capt Starchak left a small group of men on the bank of the Ugra near the Warsaw Highway to cover the detachment's departure, then led the depleted companies to an intermediate defensive position near the village of Strekalovo. Here

they met a company of cadets and a battery of 76-mm guns from the Podol'sk Military School, which considerably reinforced the detachment. In addition, 18 airborne troops who had been left on the Ugra arrived here, but even with these forces it was hard to count on a firm defense.

On 8 October major enemy forces deployed in front of the airborne troops. However on this day, too, they were not able to break the resistance of our soldiers. On the night of 8/9 October the airborne troops occupied the second hastily prepared defensive position on the Izver' River. On the morning of 9 October the fascists immediately tried to force the river in several places with their advanced detachments and reconnaissance groups, but they were unsuccessful — the troops held their bank. The artillerymen ran out of ammunition and the detachment suffered heavy losses. It now numbered less than a hundred men, and the losses were becoming more and more appreciable.

The detachment commander was forced to concentrate all those who could fight on the crossing of the highway over the Izver'. The number of casualties rose by the hour.

By evening the tankers came to relieve the airborne troops. While 410 parachutists had blocked the enemy's way at the 205th kilometer on 4 October, only around 60 men remained at the 180th kilometer from Moscow on 9 October. But the losses had not been in vain: it took the Hitlerites 5 days to cover 25 kilometers!

That is how the airborne troops fought heroically on the far approaches to Moscow.

...On 5 March 1967 there was a ceremony in Yekhnov marking the 25th anniversary of the liberation of the city. One of the streets was renamed Desantnaya to denote the great services of the parachutists in defense of the city in October 1941. For his active social military-patriotic work among the rising generation, for services in defense of the city against the fascist German aggressors, and in connection with the 25th anniversary of the city's liberation, the Executive Committee of the City Soviet of Workers' Deputies adopted a decision to award the title of Honorary Citizen of Yekhnov to the former commander of the airborne detachment, Honored Master of Sport of the USSR, Col (Res) I. G. Starchak, and to enter his name in the Book of Honorary Citizens of the city.

Chapter IV

INTO COMBAT FROM THE AIR!

The Red Army drained the Hitlerite troops of blood in the defensive battles by Moscow. With each day the resistance of our troops increased and became more stubborn. Each day cost the enemy enormous losses. His reserves were quickly exhausted. The Hitlerites did not achieve their goal of capturing Moscow. Meanwhile the Soviet Supreme Command created powerful strategic reserves and situated them on initial lines for a decisive blow against the enemy. The airborne troops also prepared to move into the enemy rear.

On the morning of 5 December troops of the Kalinin Front moved into a counteroffensive and on the following day so did the forces of the right wing of the Western Front. After only 9 days the enemy shock grouping northwest of our capital in the vicinity of Klin and Solnechnogorsk had been eliminated. To the south, in the vicinity of Tula, heavy losses were inflicted on Guderian's Panzer group. Our troops began the advance to the west.

The Hitlerites ran, abandoning equipment and military property. The command of the Western Front as early as the middle of December 1941 and the beginning of January 1942 was preparing for and implementing a landing of several airborne forces so as not to give the enemy time to collect himself after the blow at Moscow, to prevent him from making a planned withdrawal to rear defensive lines, and also to destroy various rear area objectives and means of control. The renowned commanders of these forces were Maj N. L. Soldatov, Capt I. G. Starchak, I. A. Surzhik, N. Ye. Kalashnikov, and others.

The parachute detachment of Capt I. G. Starchak, made up of 415 men, was first to be landed. They were given the mission of cutting off the Hitlerites' route of retreat from Klin. These were a portion of the forces of the Thirtieth and First Shock Armies which on 13 December were in envelopment from the northwest, east, and southeast. In attempting to move out from under the blow, the enemy began to withdraw along the only road to Teryayeva Sloboda which had not been intercepted.

To completely encircle the Klin Grouping it was necessary to block the routes of withdrawal of the Hitlerites from Klin. On the night of 14/15 December Starchak's parachutists landed in the vicinity of Teryayeva Sloboda, intercepted the road, and destroyed bridges and communications lines. The enemy abandoned equipment and retreated along country roads. Only individual groups of fascist German troops succeeded in breaking out of Klin to the west.¹ On the same day Klin was liberated by troops of Thirtieth Army in coordination with troops of the First Shock Army.

But the airborne troops not only cut off the road from Klin to Teryayeva Sloboda. They also conducted mobile operations in a vast area, cutting off other possible routes of withdrawal for the Hitlerites. Day after day they attacked columns of troops, smoked soldiers out of populated points, and destroyed enemy equipment. Night movement along roads was fully paralyzed in areas where the parachutists operated. Twilight had hardly fallen before everything stood still until daybreak.

The enemy exhausted himself in vainly trying to destroy the brave parachutists. Signs appeared on roads with inscriptions reading "Russian parachutists," and arrows on these signs indicated dangerous places.

The ninth day in which the detachment had been in the rear of the Hitlerite troops had ended. During this time the parachutists had blown up 29 bridges, set on fire 48 vehicles, two tanks, and two staff vehicles, destroyed many structures, and killed over 400 enemy soldiers and officers.

From 15 through 25 December Capt I. G. Starchak's detachment blocked the roads Klin-Volokolamsk, Volokolamsk-Lotoshino, and Klin-Novopetrovskoye and the Shakhovskaya to Novopetrovskoye Railroad. Of course a comparatively small detachment did not have the forces to liberate major populated points such as Teryayeva Sloboda, where there were considerable enemy forces. By operating in small groups along routes of enemy communications in a vast area, the parachutists undoubtedly aided in the successful troop offense from the front on the Volokolamsk-Klin Axis.

Volokolamsk was liberated on 19 December, but Starchak's detachment kept moving west and continued for six more days to deliver painful blows against the retreating enemy until it received the order to join up with friendly forces.

Medyn'

In December 1941, after the fascist German forces suffered defeat at Moscow, they were forced to withdraw to the west under the continuous blows of Soviet forces. Troops of the center and left wing of the Western Front developed the attack and by the beginning of January had moved to the line Naro-Fominsk, Kaluga, Belev.

¹ See Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945, V. 2, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1963, p. 285.

At this time the strongest enemy grouping in front of troops of the Western Front was the Kondrovo-Yukhnov-Medyn' Grouping. The most important mission of the armies of the left wing of the Western Front was the speediest destruction of this grouping. Accomplishment of this mission was assigned by Front Directive No. 269 dated 9 January 1942 to the Forty-Third, Forty-Ninth, and Fiftieth armies and the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

Under these circumstances the Military Council of the Western Front made the decision to employ an airborne landing force on the axis of advance of Forty-Third Army.

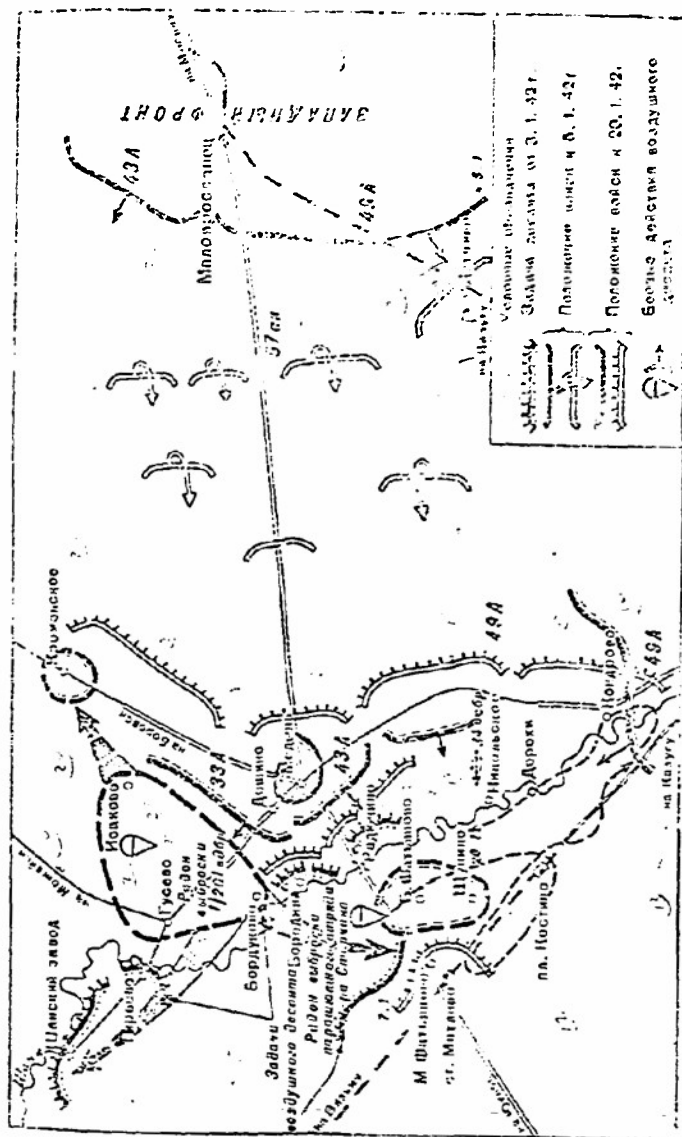
The airborne landing force included the parachute landing detachment of Maj I. G. Starchak, the parachute landing battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade commanded by Capt I. A. Surzhik, and the 250th Separate Rifle Regiment of the Western Front. The Commander of the 250th Rifle Regiment, Maj N. L. Soldatov, was appointed commander of the airborne landing force. The Commander of the Western Front assigned him the mission on 3 January of cutting off the road from Medyn' to Kremenskoye and all roads to the northwest; capturing Myatlevo Station and temporarily interrupting the railroad line; closing the routes of withdrawal from Medyn' to Yukhnov and interdicting all approaches to the railroad station of Myatlevo from Yukhnov; cutting off routes of withdrawal by highway from the direction of Polotnyanny zavod to Detchino; and of fighting until the approach of Forty-Third Army, expected on the morning of 5 January 1942.

The plan provided for movement of two parachute landing forces. The detachment of 202 parachutists under Maj I. G. Starchak was to land on the airfield at Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo with the mission of capturing it and covering the arrival of an airlanded force in TB-3 and PS-84 aircraft. The 1st Battalion of 201st Airborne Brigade, made up of 348 men, was to land in the vicinity of Gusevo, Bordukovo, and Isakovo (all points were 12-15 kilometers northwest of Medyn') with the mission of capturing and firmly holding a bridge across the Shanya River and Shanskiy zavod with a portion of the forces, seizing and holding Kremenskoye, and moving the main body to the Yukhnov-Medyn' Highway, where they were to blow up the bridge across the Shanya River.

The airlanded group of Maj Soldatov consisting of 1,300 men was the basic force in the airborne landing. It was to land on the airfield at Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo after its capture by Maj I. G. Starchak's parachutists.

Only 21 TB-3 and 10 PS-84 aircraft were designated to conduct the landing. This number of aircraft meant that the landing could be made only by making four trips. Capt Surzhik's battalion was to be the first landed, and Maj Starchak's detachment on the following day.

Surzhik's battalion landed on the night of 2/3 January 1942. First to leave the cabin of the lead plane was the Battalion Commander, Capt I. A. Surzhik. He landed safely and gave light signals with an electric torch. This was the order to drop the entire detachment.



Airborne landing in vicinity of Medyn' in January 1942 KEY: 1. Shanya River; 2. Shanskiy zavod; 3. Gireyevo; 4. Bordukovo; 5. Borodino; 6. missions of airborne force; 7. drop zone of Maj Starchak's parachute detachment; 8. to Vyaz'ma; 9. Maloye Fat'yanovo; 10. Myatlevo Station; 11. to Yukhnov; 12. Kostinc Platform; 13. to Kaluga; 14. Army; 15. Kondrovo; 16. Dorokhi; 17. Nikol'skoye; 18. oabr [otdel'naya strelkovaya brigada; separate rifle brigade]; 19. Shechukino; 20. Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo; 21. Radyukino; 22. Medyn'; 23. Doshino; 24. to Borovsk; 25. Kremenskoye; 26. Isakovo; 27. vobr [vozvushno-desantnaya brigada; airborne brigade]; 28. drop zone; 29. Gusevo; 30. to Mzhaysk; 31. ak [artilleriyskiy korpus; artillery corps]; 32. to Kaluga; 33. Datchino; 34. Western Front; 35. to Moscow; 36. Conventional signs: landing force mission as of 3 January 1942; situation by 5 January 1942; situation by 20 January 1942; combat operations of airborne landing force.

The white parachute canopies opened against the dark sky. Armed with submachine guns, machine guns, and mortars, the airborne troops came to earth. Bags with rations and ammunition came down with them on other parachutes.

All around was silence. The night was dark and overcast. The village of Gusevo was asleep. Trying not to make noise, the airborne troops emerged from the deep snow and folded their parachutes. They were headed for the assembly point from which Capt Surzhik gave the signals.

This was a happy and unforgettable night for the residents of the village of Gusevo. Their beloved and native Red Army had returned. The inhabitants willingly took the parachutes for safekeeping. While the detachment brought itself into order they organized reconnaissance so as to warn the parachutists in case the enemy appeared.

The airborne landing was a surprise for the enemy. According to local residents and the statements of prisoners, the enemy was extremely surprised by the appearance of the Soviet parachutists. The panic and confusion in the enemy camp aided the successful operations of the courageous airborne troops.

The parachutists liberated two other towns -- Gribovo and Maslovo. The small enemy garrisons located therein took off for the forests.

The battalion took up a perimeter defense. A group of soldiers blew up the bridge across the river. Capt Surzhik learned that several days previously the enemy had forced the populace to clear the road of snow so as to restore traffic on it.

"Now they won't pass," decided the Capt firmly.

Everyone passing along the road fell into the hands of the parachutists. The airborne troops captured several small groups of enemy soldiers and wagons moving toward the front. One soldier had an order which stated that certain subunits would move west by country roads. Capt Surzhik immediately sent out ambushes on these roads, and the enemy's route was cut off.

The next day a captured Pfc told them that the enemy had sent two detachments to battle the parachutists. The troopers prepared to meet the enemy. Soon up to 200 enemy soldiers appeared from the direction of the town of Gireyevo. The parachutists met them with fire. A fierce struggle broke out, which ended with a bold attack by the parachutists. With bayonets and butts they destroyed the hated fascists, thus saving the cartridges which were so precious in the enemy rear.

The battle lasted 1½ hours. The Hitlerites were utterly routed and ran, leaving 78 dead on the battlefield. Pvt Rudenko, who dispatched several Hitlerites with his rifle butt, especially distinguished himself in this battle.



After landing in the enemy rear

The front was already approaching the vicinity of Gusevo. Two scouts came to Capt Surzhik from the unit advancing from the front. They reported that the villages of Kochubeyevo and Varvarovka had been liberated. Capt Surzhik decided to link up with friendly units.

After taking the town of Pirovo without a fight, the detachment headed for Fedorovka, where, according to available information, there were up to 400 soldiers and the remains of the headquarters of the 183rd Infantry Division. When it was learned of the approach of the airborne troops, the enemy took to the woods.

A retreating enemy column also declined battle near the settlement of Kremenskoye, leaving 31 vehicles, 30 motorcycles, and three heavy guns.

When the 1st Battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade linked up with friendly troops, the parachutists had both prisoners and rich trophies. They had carried out their mission. The airborne troops had sown panic in the enemy camp, facilitated the capture of a number of populated points, cut the roads to the west, and destroyed over 200 Hitlerites.

Nurse Mariya Vasil'yevna Tatarenko jumped into the enemy rear along with Surzhik's battalion. The destiny of this woman parachutist was an interesting one.

After completing secondary school on the eve of war, she dreamed of becoming a pilot such as Polina Osipenko, but there was no flying club in her vicinity. Thus she went to nurses' school. However she was not to study for long. The Great Patriotic War began, and the entire Soviet people rose to defend the Motherland.

With difficulty the girl succeeded in getting to the front as a medical worker accompanying a march formation of reinforcements. This was in August of 1941.

The train carrying the reinforcements fell under a heavy bombing attack at Orel. There were killed and wounded. Her hands shook somewhat from agitation, but the soldiers didn't notice. This was her baptism of fire.

The train arrived at its appointed destination. The young soldiers detrained and set off for the unit in which they were to serve. Tatarenko set off with them, although she was supposed to have returned. In the unit she requested the head of the brigade's medical service to keep her there.

"And you won't be afraid if we have to make a parachute jump?"

"No, Comrade Commander, it's a good thing I'm here."

And Mariya remained in the unit. The interesting days stretched out, filled with happy experiences. She learned a great deal in preparing herself for the forthcoming battles. She studied parachuting. One morning Marusya announced to the entire medical station: "Today I jump." A bit excited, she left for the airfield.

So she jumped, and a short time later left with the brigade for the front. Here, not sparing her energy or her life, she carried wounded from the battlefield, giving them assistance and saving many lives.

Three months later Mariya Tatarenko was awarded the Medal "For Valor" for her self-sacrificing combat work.

The brigade picked experienced airborne troops for carrying out a mission in the enemy rear. Tatarenko appealed to many commanders with the request to send her in Capt Surzhik's detachment, but everyone refused. Then she firmly decided to run away and justify this by actions.

That is what she did, with the help, of course, of friends among the troops. Soon the detachment received a specific combat mission. At night on the airfield Capt Surzhik explained the assigned mission to everyone. The motors roared and the aircraft took off and disappeared in the darkness. Mariya Tatarenko was on one of them.

The aircraft slowed down over the town of Gusevo. Everyone knew that the time had come to jump. The nurse jumped along with all the others. She took off her gloves, forgetting about the intense cold. The wind penetrated her clothing and her body stung with pain. Her hands began to freeze. She landed and got to her feet, but couldn't unfasten the harness. Her fingers wouldn't bend. Suddenly a figure appeared in the distance. Mariya got out her pistol with difficulty, but did not have the strength to press the trigger -- her fingers were so stiff that they didn't respond. Fortunately this

turned out to be a boy from the town. He helped Mariya unfasten the harness and led her to the other parachutists...

In the battle for the village of Gusevo Mariya was bandaging a wounded soldier. She placed him on a sled and started to take him to the aid station. Suddenly she caught sight of a Hitlerite behind a bush. He was attempting to attack her. She quickly took out her pistol and fired point-blank. This time her fingers weren't frozen.

"This is for everything!"

Maj Starchak's parachute detachment received a mission on 3 January. After the drop of parachutists and the airlanding of the 250th Rifle Regiment commanded by Maj Soldatov in the enemy rear, they were to capture a road junction in the vicinity of Medyn', capture the Myatlevo Station, interrupt movement on the railroad, and prevent the possible withdrawal of the enemy from Medyn' to Yukhnov and from Yukhnov to Myatlevo Station.

The initial mission of Maj Starchak's detachment was to seize the airfield near Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo and support the airlanding of a force thereon.

There was a limited number of aircraft allotted — 21 TB-3 and 10 PS-84. Nevertheless, this permitted dropping the parachutists in one trip and landing the airlanded force with two or three trips.

The plan provided that on the morning of 3 January 1942 there be a reconnaissance of enemy airfields and aviation in areas adjacent to the Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo airfield, and 1½ hours before take-off of the parachute group it was planned to send a special aircraft to reconnoiter the weather along the flight path and in the drop zone, since frequent snowstorms created great difficulties for flights and for dropping parachutists. It was also planned to deliver an air strike against enemy garrisons and reserves in the vicinity of Medyn' and Yukhnov several hours before the drop and immediately before the beginning of the airlanding, so as to draw the enemy away from the landing zone and prevent his reserves from approaching this area to battle the airlanded force. In addition, a special aircraft with incendiary means was assigned to create a lighted orientation point in the vicinity of Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo.

In connection with the considerable activity of enemy aviation and the heavy antiaircraft artillery fire, the decision was made to make the landing at night. Fighter aviation of the Moscow Air Defense Zone was assigned the mission of covering the jump-off position for the landing (Vnukovo Airfield).

In preparing for the landing and combat operations, a special instruction was prepared for personnel of Starchak's group concerning seizure of the airfield and supporting the landing thereon of the airlanded force.

To capture the airfield, various groups were detailed from the parachute landing force: for seizure, support, reserve, and an airfield alert crew.

The seizure group was assigned to suppress resistance of the garrison and flight-technical personnel and for seizing the field, equipment, airfield buildings, and communications facilities. The group landed right on the airfield.

The support group was dropped 2-3 kilometers from the airfield so as to take up positions convenient for defense and hinder the approach of enemy reserves to the airfield.

The commander's reserve, of platoon size, was dropped together with the battalion commander in the center of the airfield and operated in accordance with the situation.

The alert crew was airlanded with a radio station and wire facilities 30 minutes after the parachute landing, right after the seizure group. Starting equipment was prepared to mark the landing strip and a system of markings was devised for night take-offs. The alert crew also included demolitions men for reconnoitering the airfield and removing obstacles thereon. It was conceivable that at the moment of arrival of the aircraft with the alert crew the landing signal would not yet be laid out on the airfield. Then the aircraft would have to wait in the air (in the vicinity of the airfield) for a half hour. At the end of this time, if there were no signals permitting a landing, the aircraft with the alert crew was to return to its airfield.

Maj Starchak deployed his command post at the spot where he landed and directed the fight to capture the airfield. Later he shifted it to where it was more convenient to control the delivery of the airlanded force and his subunits.

Immediately after the parachute force landed, reconnaissance groups and patrols were sent out in different directions for a distance of 5-10 kilometers from the airfield.

If they did not succeed in capturing the airfield, Maj Starchak was to report this to his superior and move his battalion to join the 1st Battalion of the 201st Airborne Brigade or, depending on the situation, begin disrupting the control and operations of the enemy rear in the interests of troops of Forty-Third Army.

The plan of combat operations in the enemy rear was gone over in detail with all officers, and the plan for capturing the airfield was practiced on the maps. In addition, on the eve of their departure the parachutists became familiar with all details of the seizure of the airfield. In case of loss of orientation or imprecise drop, each airborne trooper and each subunit as a whole were to operate independently in the interests of accomplishing the overall mission.

Maj Starchak's parachute battalion was landed on the night of 3/4 January on the Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo airfield. The transport aircraft with troops were subjected to fire by heavy enemy antiaircraft artillery barrages while flying over the front line and during the drop and landing.

It was difficult for the crews of the aircraft to orient themselves. Some crews lost their bearings due to poor weather conditions. The aircraft were forced to deviate from their routes while dodging the antiaircraft fire. Some crews did not find their target and returned to their own airfield without carrying out the mission.

After the parachute landing force had dropped, it turned out that around 15 percent of its men did not come to the assembly point. Nevertheless the force did not await a full complement, but went into the attack. However they did not succeed in crushing enemy resistance and capturing the airfield in the vicinity of Bol'shoye and Maloye Fat'yanovo until the end of 4 January. During the fighting the airborne troops destroyed 12 firing emplacements. There were no aircraft on the airfield, since the enemy considered it in reserve, but it had a strong defense.

As was planned, the aircraft with the alert crew appeared over the airfield at 0300 hours on 4 January 1942, but it was not possible to receive them. The enemy resistance was not yet fully crushed, and the landing strip required snow removal.

After capturing the airfield at the end of the day, the parachutists set up a defense and began to prepare for receiving the transport aircraft with the airlanded party. But the weather abruptly worsened on the morning of 5 January. A heavy snowstorm came up and the airfield was again covered with snow.

On 5 January two MiG aircraft flew low over the drop area of the parachutists, who set out recognition signals for them. A short time later a U-2 liaison aircraft landed on the Bol'shoye Fat'yanovo airfield. Catching sight of the parachutists and taking them outwardly for Hitlerites, the pilot took off without stopping his engine and flew away.

After assembling, the detachment began clearing the drop area of the enemy. It turned out there were 12 earth-and-timber emplacements here. The fight to destroy the Hitlerites was long and stubborn. Blockading individual emplacements and suppressing their fire, the troops gradually tightened their circle about them and destroyed them.

In connection with the bad weather conditions on 5 and 6 January and the operational situation which had changed during this time, landing of the remaining portion of the force (250th Rifle Regiment) was called off. Maj Starchak's parachute battalion took up independent diversionary actions in the enemy rear in the area of advance of Forth-Third Army.



Meeting with the local populace on liberated soil

On 5 January Maj Starchak's detachment moved to Kostino Platform and blew up a nearby bridge. On the night of 7/8 January the detachment captured Myatlevo Station in a surprise attack. Here they destroyed two enemy trains with 28 tanks and other combat equipment.

From 8 through 19 January the detachment conducted combat operations under exceptionally difficult conditions of the severe winter of 1941/1942 on the roads south of Medyn' and in the vicinity of Kondrovo. In the woods west of Dorokhi the troops destroyed a large supply convoy: 119 wagons with military supplies were given to troops of the Forty-Ninth Army.

Headquarters of the Western Front informed Maj Starchak that the 34th Separate Rifle Brigade was setting off for his area of operations. The airborne troops went to meet them and on 20 January linked up the the brigade in the vicinity of Nikol'skoye. By this time there was a total of 87 men in the detachment. The remainder had perished in the 17 days of difficult combat against the enemy.

By their bold and decisive actions, the parachute battalion of Maj Starchak had interrupted movement on the railroad to Myatlevo Station for a certain time and had partially disorganized the work of the enemy division and regiment service areas to the front of Forty-Third Army. This aided its successful advance to a certain extent.

Thus the mission assigned to the airborne parachute detachment of Maj Starchak was successfully accomplished -- the airfield had been captured, but the difficult weather conditions (heavy snowdrifts) and changing situation precluded the need for landing a force in the designated area. It is true that successful accomplishment of the assigned mission had been accompanied by heavy losses, and Starchak himself returned sick and frost-bitten to Bol'shaya zemlya.

Toward Belov's Horse Cavalry

By 19 January 1942 troops of Forty-Third and Forth-Ninth armies had encircled the Yuhnov grouping of Hitlerite forces from the northeast and south. On 20 January the Commander of the Western Front ordered Thirty-Third Army to exploit the breakthrough to the north of Yuhnov and in coordination with the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps take Vyaz'ma.

With the goal of aiding the successful advance of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, supporting the advance of Thirty-Third Army in a western direction, assisting our forces in the encirclement and destruction of the enemy Yuhnov grouping, the Western Front command made the decision to use the airborne units and the 250th Rifle Regiment.

It was planned to drop the force 40 kilometers southeast of Vyaz'ma in the vicinity of Znamenka, Zhelan'ye, and Lugi. At the moment the troops were dropped, this area was 35-40 kilometers from the front of our troops.

The broken terrain made it possible to land and drop the force secretly. The area of operations of the airborne troops encompassed the Vyaz'ma-Yuhnov high road, along which the enemy Yuhnov grouping was supplied, and not far away passed the Vyaz'ma-Bryansk railroad line. All these lines of communications were important for the Hitlerites and could be intercepted by the landing force.

According to reconnaissance information, a division headquarters, service units, and up to a battalion of Hitlerite infantry were located in the regional center of Znamenka. There was an ammunition dump with a battalion on guard at the Godunovka siding. There was a major headquarters in the town of Podsosenki and up to a battalion of infantry in the points Klimov-Zavod, Sidorovskoye, and Sinyukovo. There were up to two battalions in the vicinity of the De'bryanskiy siding and Ugra Station. However due to heavy snowdrifts these garrisons were almost isolated one from another. Only the most important roads were kept in a passable condition. Therefore, since the airborne forces had a certain mobility on skis, they could deliver bold blows against even strong individual garrisons and successfully interrupt enemy traffic on the few passable roads.

The 250th Rifle Regiment and 1st and 2nd Battalions of 201st Airborne Brigade were used for the airborne landing operation. Formation and training for the airborne landing were accomplished by the Air Force Administration of the Western Front on Vnukovo Airfield. Preparations for the landing and combat operations were completed by 17 January.

The special-purpose flight unit of the Civil Air Fleet made up of 21 PS-84 aircraft was brought in for the landing. In addition, the 23rd Bomber Air Division made several TB-3 aircraft available for transporting 45-mm antitank guns. All aircraft were on Vnukovo Airfield on the eve of take-off.

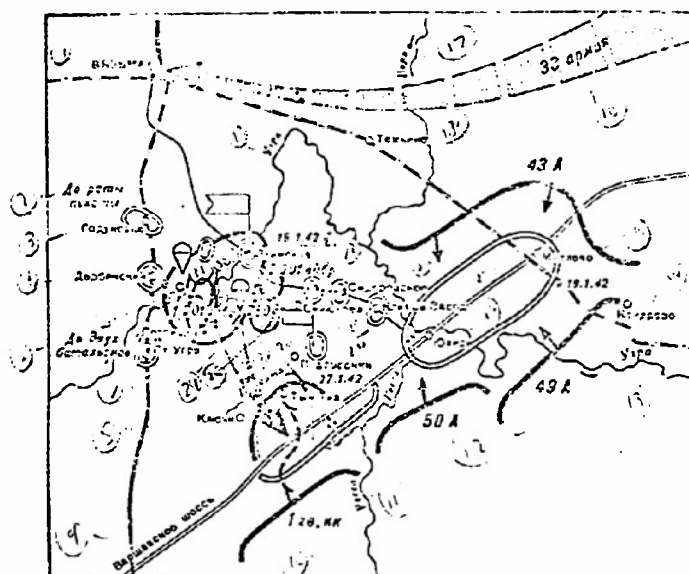
¹ See *Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945*, v. 2, p. 325.

The flight personnel had sufficient practice in night flying and demonstrated excellent training and an ability to land on poorly illuminated areas with snow cover. The aircraft were well adapted for landing troops and required no outfitting. They had flexible machine guns for self defense.

It was planned to land the troops in three stages.

In the first stage the parachutists would capture and hold the landing strip and adjacent region with the aim of preparing for and receiving an airlanded force.

In the second stage, after the parachutists had landed and captured the landing strip, the airfield alert crew would land. It would set up the control area and arrange to receive the airlanded force.



Airborne landing southeast of Vyaz'ma in January 1942

KEY: 1. Vyaz'ma; 2. up to a company of infantry; 3. Godunovka; 4. Derbyanskiy; 5. up to two battalions; 6. Petrishchevo; 7. Ugra Station; 8. Klyuchi; 9. Warsaw Highway; 10. gv. kk [gvardeyskiy kavaleriyskiy korpus; Guards cavalry corps]; 11. Rossa; 12. Army; 13. Ugra; 14. Kondrovo; 15. Myatlevo; 16. Army; 17. Vorya; 18. Tomkino; 19. Yukhnov; 20. Klimov-Zavod; 21. Sidorovskoye; 22. airborne brigade; 23. Znamenka; 24. Podsosenki; 25. Sinyukovo; 26. Tynovka; 27. Popolta; 28. rifle regiment; 29. Zhelan'ye; 30. airborne brigade; 31. Lugi.

In the third stage the first group of the airlanded force would begin landing in the enemy rear 30 minutes after the alert crew had landed. Subunits of the 250th Rifle Regiment were transported by groups with 2-3 aircraft in each group, so as not to create a great accumulation of aircraft and people on the airfield.

On 18 January at 0335 hours the first group of 16 aircraft with parachutists began taking off from Vnukovo. Before 0900 hours 452 men had been dropped in the vicinity of Znamenka and Zhelan'ye. A second group of parachutists was sent to the same area on the following night in 10 aircraft. As a result of unfavorable weather a portion of the aircraft returned, and one lost its bearings.

A total of 642 men were landed in two days with light arms, mortars, and antitank rifles.

Between 1700 and 1800 hours on 18 January four PS-84 aircraft with 65 men of the alert crew landed on the field strip indicated by partisans near the southern outskirts of Znamenka. The planes landed in darkness on a snow covering of 50-60 centimeters, on an unfamiliar field only 1.5-2 kilometers from a populated point occupied by the enemy. The aircraft did not have skis, and as a result one of them was not able to take off.

Throughout the day of 19 January Capt Surzhik directed the work of preparing the landing strip for receiving the airlanded party. In addition to the alert crew, partisans and the local populace were used for this work. On the following day, 20 January, Surzhik reported: "Landing on wheels is possible at coordinates 38535; send urgently. Surzhik."

Due to unfavorable weather conditions the airlanding was made on the strip at Flesnev on 20, 21, and 22 January. By this time the enemy aviation had discovered the area in which the force had landed and began to deliver bombing strikes and machine gun fire against it. As a result, landings could only be made at night. However, thanks to the swiftness of action of the parachutists, the losses for the entire period of the landing were insignificant.

Troops of Fiftieth, Forty-Ninth, and Forty-Third armies continued to wage fierce battles with a major enemy grouping which was partially encircled in the vicinity of Yukhnov. They pinned the enemy forces down and allowed the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and advance divisions of Thirty-Third Army to penetrate into the rear of the enemy Yukhnov grouping and develop the blow against Vyaz'ma.

In connection with this the Front Commander ordered a portion of the forces of the airborne party to capture the enemy strong point at the town of Klyuchi by the morning of 26 January and thus aid the Corps in breaking through the enemy defenses along the Warsaw Highway. Two parachute battalions under Capt Surzhik were sent to carry out this mission.

By this time the area of Zhelan'ye, Lugi, and Znamenka was being held by the airborne landing force. Separate detachments of the 250th Rifle Regiment were operating along the Yukhnov to Vyaz'ma road, hindering the movement of enemy troops.

In carrying out its assigned mission, the composite detachment of parachutists took several populated points on the move, destroying the garrisons located therein, and on the morning of 26 January captured Petrishchevo.

On 27 January formations of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps cut the Warsaw Highway 35 kilometers southwest of Yukhnov, and on 30 January linked up with airborne troops of the 250th Rifle Regiment 40-50 kilometers west of Yukhnov. Parachutists and horse cavalrymen had met two days earlier in Tynovka.

On 2 February the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps moved to the approaches to Vyaz'ma. That evening advance units of Thirty-Third Army approached the city and began fighting in its southeast outskirts.

Subsequently the 1st and 2nd battalions of 201st Airborne Brigade operated in the enemy rear as part of the 8th Airborne Brigade, which was landed at the end of January.

Thus the airborne landing force accomplished an important mission — capture and retention for several days of very important routes in the rear of the enemy Yukhnov grouping, paralyzing its mobility, and interruption of the work of the rear service area. This eased the offensive operations of troops of the left wing of the Western Front.

To The Aid of Those Encircled

Going somewhat ahead in time, it is useful to tell about a brief combat episode which took place on the Kalinin Front in February 1942 when an exceptionally difficult situation arose for the encircled troops of Twenty-Ninth Army in the vicinity of Rzhev.

The Commander of the Kalinin Front ordered Twenty-Ninth Army to move out of the encirclement, inflicting a blow to the south, toward Thirty-Ninth Army.

In order to aid the encircled units of Twenty-Ninth Army it was decided to drop one airborne battalion in the area held by that Army. The 4th Battalion of the 204th Airborne Brigade, commanded by Sr Lt P. L. Belotserkovskiy, was readied to carry out this mission. The battalion landed by parachute on an area in the vicinity of Monchalovo and Okorckovo, after taking off from Lyubertsy Airfield. Five hundred men made the jump.

A signal — fires in the form of a triangle and square — was arranged to mark the landing zone. The fires were to be lit on instructions of headquarters of Twenty-Ninth Army approximately in the center of the region being

held. Assembly signals were also established for the post-drop period. Junior commanders received a sketch of the drop zone. All personnel were told the names of the populated points and characteristic orientation points in the vicinity of the drop zone.

The battalion was dropped from solitary aircraft in two trips on the night of 16/17 February. However it turned out to be so difficult to find the limited drop zone from the primitive signals, that some aircraft crews did not accomplish this, did not fulfill the mission, and returned to the airfield from which they had come with the parachutists. On that night many different fires, lights, and blazes of all possible configurations were seen both in our camp and in the enemy camp. This made it difficult for the flight crews to get their bearings and perform their work.

As a result around 100 men were not dropped. It was not advisable to drop this group of parachutists on the following night due to the abrupt changes in the situation in the drop area. The flight was made to the drop area at an altitude of 1000-1200 meters, and 5-10 kilometers from the area the aircraft descended with their engines cut back to a height of 300-400 meters and dropped the parachutists over the center of the area plane by plane.

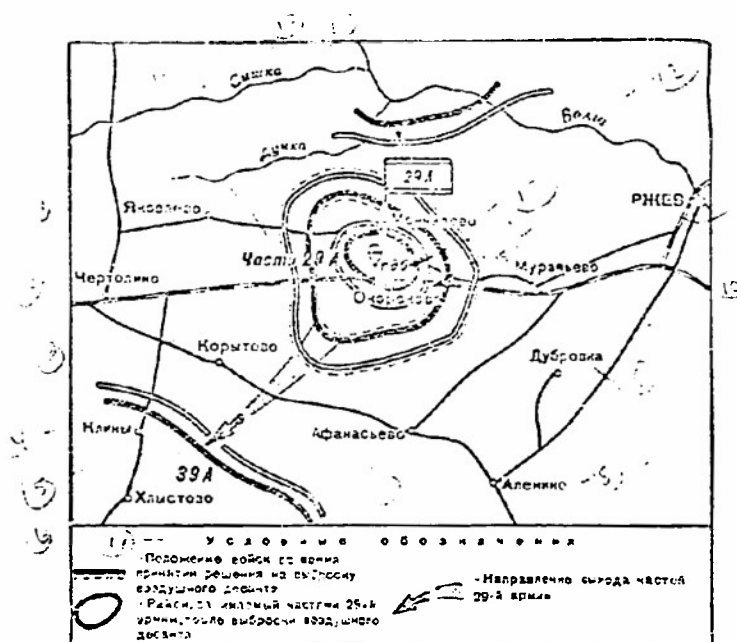
Fierce fighting was going on in the drop area. The pilots observed many blazes and bonfires, and it was extremely difficult for them to get their bearings. In addition, the enemy was firing on the aircraft with all types of small arms. However night fighters and antiaircraft artillery gave almost no resistance to the drop, as a result of which neither the airborne troops nor the flight crews sustained losses in the air.

The area held by the encircled units was 8 kilometers from west to east and up to 7 kilometers from north to south. As a result, even the planned center of the drop zone was under enemy artillery fire. At the very moment the drop was made fighting was going on for the village of Okorokovo. A group of enemy submachine gunners had filtered into the depth of defense of units of Twenty-Ninth Army. Over a company of enemy infantry with several tanks had broken through northeast of Okorokovo.

Under these extremely difficult conditions of the combat situation which had arisen in the drop zone, it was not only difficult for the aircraft crews to drop the parachutists accurately, but it was also exceptionally hard to assemble after landing and seek out the supplies and heavy weapons dropped by parachute in soft bags.

After landing, the airborne troops were forced to immediately enter combat with small groups of enemy soldiers. There was no time to seek out the dropped supplies. It was in the course of the fighting and with the onset of daylight that the light airborne bags with rations, ammunition, and mortars were picked up.

In spite of the difficult situation during the drop and landing, the parachutists displayed exceptional courage. Their actions were highly regarded by the encircled troops of Twenty-Ninth Army. Many officers, including the battalion commander, sergeants, and rank and file airborne troops, did not leave the fighting even with numerous wounds.



Drop area and combat operations of the 4th Battalion of the 204th Airborne Brigade (17-22 February 1942)

KEY: 1. Yakovlev; 2. Chertolino; 3. Korytovo; 4. Kliny; 5. Army; 6. Khlystovo; 7. Afanas'yev; 8. Alenino; 9. Dubrovka; 10. Murav'yev; 11. Rzhnev; 12. Volga; 13. Monchalovo; 14. airborne parachute battalion; 15. Korokovo; 16. Dunka; 17. Sishka; 18. Units of Twentieth-Ninth Army; 19. Conventional signs: situation of the troops while the decision was being made to drop an airborne force; area occupied by units of Twenty-Ninth Army after airborne force was dropped; direction of movement of units of Twentieth-Ninth Army.

The stubbornness and bravery of the airborne troops inspired those encircled, raised their morale, and gave them assurance that the ring of encirclement would be broken. In addition, the troops shared their reserves of ammunition and rations with the soldiers and officers of Twenty-Ninth Army, who were exhausted from many days of hard fighting in encirclement.

On the night of 17/18 February 1942 units of Twenty-Ninth Army began to break out of the encirclement. By 22 February 1942 the units had completed their movement from encirclement.

The Commander of Twenty-Ninth Army declared his thanks to all personnel of the 4th Battalion of the 204th Airborne Brigade. All parachutists who had participated in this operation were recommended for governmental awards.

Chapter V

BETWEEN VYAZ'MA AND SMOLENSK

As a result of the successful development of the Soviet offensive in January on the western axis, Group of Armies "Center" was separated into Vyaz'ma, Yukhnov, Zhizdra, and Bolkhov groupings. Of these, the Vyaz'ma Grouping was the strongest in numbers and most important in significance. With its destruction and the liberation of Vyaz'ma the way was opened for further advance of Soviet troops on the Smolensk Axis.

In the middle of January the left wing of the Western Front (Forty-Third, Forty-Ninth, and Tenth armies and the Group of Gen. Belov) was given the mission of destroying the enemy Kondrovo-Yukhnov-Medyn' Grouping, interdicting the Vyaz'ma-Bryansk rail line, and later advancing in the general direction of Vyaz'ma with the goal of encircling the enemy Mozhaysk-Gzhatsk-Vyaz'ma Grouping in coordination with advancing troops of the Kalinin Front and armies of the right wing and center of the Western Front.¹

Movement of Thirty-Third Army of the Western Front onto the approaches to Vyaz'ma from the east, of the 11th Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front from the northwest, and of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps of the Western Front from the south created favorable conditions for destruction of the enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping. Under these circumstances the landing of a major airborne force west of Vyaz'ma would aid troops of both fronts in completing the encirclement and subsequent destruction of the enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping.

A decision was made on 15 January 1942 on employing an airborne force of corps size (around 10,000 parachutists) in the interests of advancing troops of both fronts.

The experience of the landing and combat operations of this airborne force has its peculiarities and is very instructive.

¹See Razgrom nemetsko-fashistskikh voysk pod Moskvoy (Defeat of the Fascist German Troops at Moscow), edited by Mar. SU V. D. Sokolovskiy, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1964, p. 350.

This was the first case in military history in which it was planned to land such a large unit as an airborne corps at night and under difficult winter conditions.

The employment of a major airborne landing was a bold decision by the Soviet command in answer to the operational situation which had arisen then in the vicinity of Vyaz'ma.

The serious deficiencies allowed in the preparation and conduct of the airborne operation cannot be justified, but in speaking about them one must not forget the time and specific conditions under which it was carried out. Its basic defect was the fact that insufficient aircraft were allocated for supporting the mission. The military transport aviation used to carry out the landing could do so only in the course of several days, and thus lose the surprise in landing an airborne force and complicate its operations after the landing in the enemy rear.

The 4th Airborne Corps, based near Moscow, included three airborne brigades (8th, 9th, and 214th) and corps units.

In comparison with other large airborne units formed in the course of the war, this corps had the greatest combat experience, received at the beginning of the war. As mentioned earlier, its 214th Airborne Brigade operated for around three months in enemy rears in Belorussia.

On 17 January the Commander of Airborne Forces, Maj Gen V. A. Glazunov, assigned the mission to the Commander of the 4th Airborne Corps, Maj Gen A. F. Levashev, to concentrate units of the corps by rail at the initial area for the landing. The rear service area of the Western Front provided transportation both to the permanent station and to the initial area to replenish the corps with supplies and rations needed for the operation. The airfields used for taking off were located 30-40 kilometers from the front line. This short distance permitted the transport aircraft to make a large number of sorties in a day. This had a very important significance in view of the limited number of aircraft made available for the landing.

It was planned to take off for the mission from three field strips situated near Kaluga.

The corps was moved by rail to the initial area over tracks which had not yet been fully restored. This led to the necessity to transfer the loads of trains on destroyed sectors of the rail line. For example, the railroad bridge over the Oka River had been blown up by the Hitlerites in their retreat, and at the time trainloads of the 4th Airborne Corps arrived, it had not yet been restored. The troops were forced to drag their supplies and weapons over the ice of the river to other trains brought up to the opposite bank. This entailed great difficulties.

Measures for the concealed massing of troops were not observed either en route or on arrival at the initial area. Airborne supplies were poorly camouflaged, personnel were dressed in special winter clothing long before

the landing operation, and headquarters of airborne units were set up in populated points only recently liberated from the Hitlerite troops.

All this could not help but be noticed by enemy intelligence.

By 16 January the headquarters of the airborne troops and the Air Forces had jointly worked out a plan for the airborne landing operation. The plan defined the goal and missions of the airborne landing, the composition and actions of forces taking part, and questions of operational and combat support.

The plan unfortunately did not include questions of conduct of combat operations by units of the landing force, nor coordination with front troops along the axes on which the landing force was employed.

In accordance with the plan, the command of airborne forces was to exercise direct control over the landing. It was planned to set up control from a command post deployed in the initial area, in Kaluga. The Commander of the Air Forces exercised overall control in the operation on questions of landing and aircraft support from Moscow.

The basic goal of employment of the landing force was to prevent enemy withdrawal from the vicinity of Vyaz'ma to the west, and thus aid troops of the Western and Kalinin fronts in encircling and destroying the enemy Rzhev-Vyaz'ma Grouping of Group of Armies "Center."

To accomplish the assigned mission, the plan provided for dropping the main body of the 4th Airborne Corps in the area southwest of Vyaz'ma with the mission of cutting the main enemy lines of communication between Vyaz'ma and Smolensk. Simultaneously a portion of the corps strength would interdict enemy routes of withdrawal from the area of Vyaz'ma to the northwest.

For the purpose of leading the enemy astray, the operation plan provided for dropping reconnaissance and diversionary groups and false airborne landing forces in several areas.

It was planned to have 40 PS-84 aircraft of the Civil Air Fleet and 25 TB-3 aircraft of the Air Forces to make up the air transport group. The landing and combat operations of the airborne force were to be supported by fighter and ground attack aviation.

It was planned to make the entire landing at night, with only the landing of the advance landing detachment, which was to support the drop of the corps main body, planned toward the end of the day while there was still light.

It was planned to begin the landing on 21 January, but since the massing of corps units in the initial area was delayed, the landing was moved to 26-27 January with the previous mission.

By the beginning of landing by the 4th Airborne Corps the operational situation on the western axis had basically experienced no substantial changes, therefore it was fully justified to employ the airborne landing force with the previously assigned mission. However the offensive of the Kalinin and Western fronts developed extremely slowly, and the left wing of the Western Front had no success at all.

The aerial situation also did not favor conduct of an airborne operation. The combat activity of enemy aviation in the sector of the Western Front had considerably increased, particularly toward the end of January.

On 24 January the Commander of the 4th Airborne Corps received the following order from Army Gen G. K. Zhukov, Commander of the Western Front: "To Comrade Levashev. Mission: 26-27 January land corps and occupy positions in accordance with the map. Goal — cut off withdrawal of the enemy to the west. Zhukov. 24 January 1942. 1300 hours." The order was entered on a 1:100,000 map with an indication of the areas which corps units were to occupy after landing in the enemy rear. The map also contained a brief resume of the goal of employment of the airborne landing force.

A portion of the corps forces was to take up a defense with the front to the east on a sector from Rebrovo to Berezniki, stretching around 8 kilometers along the line of former defensive structures built by our forces in October 1941. This front of defense interdicted the Moscow to Minsk railroad and superhighway. The corps reserve (around a brigade) was to concentrate 6-8 kilometers west of this defensive position in readiness for actions both toward Vyaz'ma and in the direction of Smolensk. One reinforced battalion was ordered to take up a defense with front to the west, east of the Dnieper.

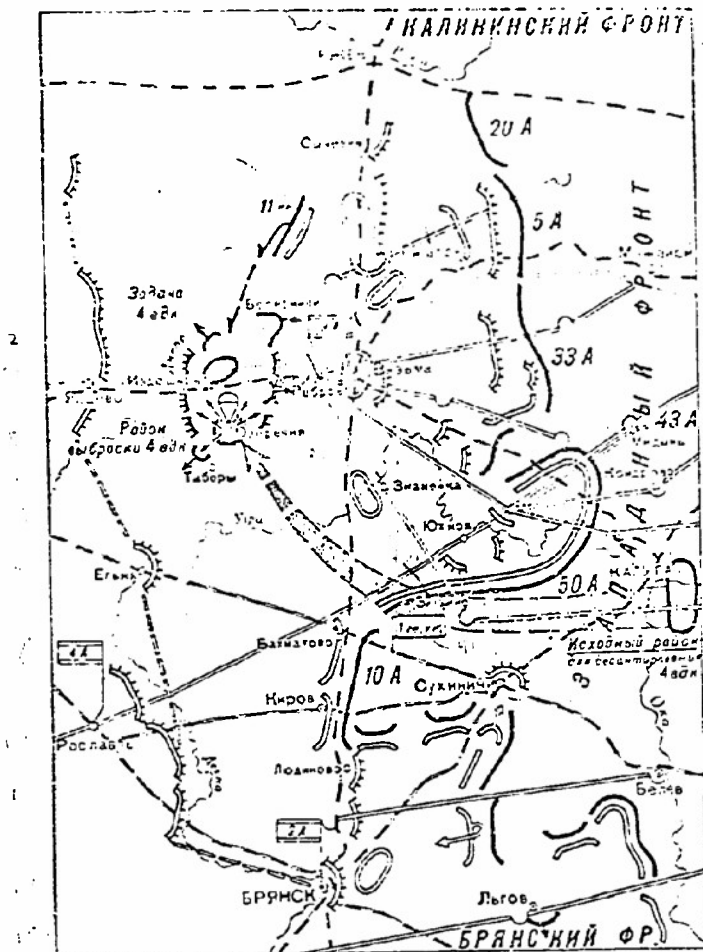
In addition, the map showed the drop zones of parachute detachments which were to land outside the boundaries of the general drop zone to conduct reconnaissance and diversionary activities.

Thus the order directed particular attention to the fact that the main efforts of the corps should be toward the east so as to delay the enemy withdrawing from the vicinity of Vyaz'ma to the west.

In making the decision on landing the airborne force, neither the headquarters of the Western Front nor the command of the airborne forces had reliable information on the enemy in the drop zone, in spite of the fact that partisan detachments and Maj Soldatov's airborne troops were operating in the vicinity of Vyaz'ma. Reconnaissance aircraft of the aviation group supporting the airborne landing made several flights, but there were no substantial results. Later when the landing began it turned out that there was a considerable number of enemy garrisons and troops in the area of combat operations of the landing force.

From the time that the decision was made to employ the 4th Airborne Corps in the operation of the Western Front to encircle and destroy the

enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping until the beginning of the actual operation a period of 10 days passed. Naturally the operational situation on the Western Front had somewhat changed during even this short period of time.



Situation on the Western Front as of 25 January 1942 and the plan for employment of the 4th Airborne Corps

KEY: 1. Mission of 4th Airborne Corps; 2. Dnieper River; 3. Izdeshkovo; 4. Yartsevo; 5. Drop zone of 4th Abn Corps; 6. Tabor; 7. Ugra River; 8. Yel'nya; 9. Army; 10. Bakhmatovo; 11. Roslavl'; 12. Desna River; 13. Kirov; 14. Lyudikovo; 15. Bryansk; 16. Bryansk Front; 17. L'gov; 18. Belev; 19. Oka River; 20. Sukhinichi; 21. Initial area for landing operation; 22. Kaluga; 23. Kondrovo; 24. Medyn'; 25. Western Front; [Legend continued on next page]

26. Army; 27. Mozhaysk; 28. Kalinin Front; 29. Volga River; 30. Rzhev;
31. Sychevka; 32. kk /kavaleriyskiy korpus; cavalry corps/; 33. Gzhatsk;
34. Berezniki; 35. Vyaz'ma; 36. Rebrovo; 37. Ozerechnya; 38. Znamenka;
39. Yukhnov; 40. Zyuzino; 41. 1st Guards Cavalry Corps; 42. Sukhinichi.

On 25 January troops of the Kalinin Front continued to develop their offensive from the north to the south and closely approached the Minsk to Moscow superhighway with the advance guard 11th Cavalry Corps. Thirty-Third Army of the Western Front also moved from the east, although slowly, in the direction of Vyaz'ma. Only troops of the left wing of this Front did not succeed in breaking the German defenses along the Warsaw Highway.

Based on the assigned mission and the current situation at the front, Maj Gen A. F. Levashev, Commander of the 4th Airborne Corps, made the following decision at 1800 hours on 26 January.

The main body of the corps would land southwest of Vyaz'ma with the mission of cutting enemy lines of communication between Vyaz'ma and Dorogobuzh and preventing the movement of enemy reserves from the west and the withdrawal of enemy units to the west.

A portion of the corps forces was given the mission of preventing the withdrawal of the enemy from the region of Vyaz'ma to the northwest. The diversionary groups and false airborne landing forces dropped in various areas were to be used for auxiliary actions.

On the whole the decision of the Corps Commander corresponded to the mission assigned by the Commander of the Western Front concerning organization and conduct of the landing operation. It was based on the need to drop the corps in the shortest possible time. Taking advantage of surprise, they were to capture the planned region of defense and hold it for two or three days until arrival of troops of Thirty-Third Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

The corps headquarters and the commander of the air transport group worked out the plan for the airborne landing and the tables for dropping additional cargoes of ammunition and heavy weapons after the units had landed. In addition, the corps command worked out a detailed plan for dropping reconnaissance and diversionary groups and prepared the necessary documents for coded communications.

Forty PS-84 and 22 (instead of the planned 25) TB-3 aircraft were concentrated on the airfields of the initial area for performing the drop of units.

With this number of aircraft, assuming 2-3 sorties a day per aircraft, the corps could be landed in 3-4 days under the most favorable conditions. It would require no fewer than 550-600 aircraft to drop the corps in one trip.

There were also many defects in the plan for the drop. It hardly considered bad weather conditions, the possible failure of aircraft for technical reasons, combat losses, etc. The times for subsequent sorties were not realistic.

Thus the plans and calculations for the operation were drawn up without taking account of the actual conditions and situation. They were in need of essential corrections at the very beginning of the operation and threatened the possibility of carrying out the airborne operation as a whole.

Here it should be stressed that before his decision was made, the corps commander had very insufficient information on the enemy both in the planned drop zone and in the zone of future combat operations. He knew only that two-way movement of wagons and transports had been noted in the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk sector of the superhighway and on the Vyaz'ma-Dorogobuzh Highway. He had been incorrectly informed by the front headquarters that the enemy was withdrawing and being pursued by our units. In fact, no withdrawal had begun at this time. It was only assumed by our command in connection with the advance of the Thirty-Third Army and 11th Cavalry Corps.

The command of the airborne forces and the air transport group gave little attention to the air defenses of the initial area. One fighter air regiment of reduced strength allotted for this purpose could hardly handle its mission, since in addition to covering the landing it had to periodically cover the concentration of front troops and other objectives. Moreover, the fighter pilots did not have night flying training.

The questions worked out in most detail in preparing for the airborne operation were those of organization of control both in the preparatory stage and in the course of combat operations by the airborne force. The command post of the commander of the airborne forces was deployed together with the commander of the air transport group. He had wire communications with the airfields and with the communications center of the General Staff. The wire communications were backed up by radio. It was here that radio stations were set up for communicating with the headquarters of the airborne corps and its brigades.

At the command posts of commanders of air units at each airfield there were representatives of the air units which were to perform the mission from the given airfield.

In addition to the communications center in Kaluga, the communications centers of the Western Front and the Air Forces were set up to monitor radio signals and receive messages from airborne subscribers after landing.

Special radio nets were established within the airborne landing force between brigades and corps headquarters, and special prearranged message codes were worked out.

All questions connected with the landing had been coordinated with the headquarters of transport aviation in the corps-brigade chain before the operation began. There was no coordination with combat aviation, since it did not work in the interests of the airborne landing for all practical purposes.

Later, while the landing was being conducted, the plan turned out to be feasible of accomplishment only in general outline. Therefore the corps headquarters was forced to draw up fragmentary plans daily on the eve of each drop, jointly with the commander of the air group. This was caused by the following reasons: the aircraft were concentrated later than the indicated times, and incompletely; the airfields from which the landing force was to take off were subjected to enemy air raids, which led to a partial disruption of drop times and to aircraft losses; and the flight personnel could make only 2-3 sorties a night instead of the planned 5-6, and on some nights it was even less.

A portion of the aircraft crews returned without fulfilling the mission, due to poor support by air control facilities in the drop zone. This also led to disruption of the landing plan. Brigade headquarters received a daily extract of the landing plan from corps headquarters. Representatives -- staff officers of the corps and the air group -- were located at each airfield. They exercised control over the readiness of the aircraft for take-off and over the timely arrival of personnel and loading of cargoes. They kept track of the number of aircraft which took off from the airfields with personnel and cargoes.

A Difficult Beginning

The corps commander decided to drop the 2nd Parachute Landing Battalion of the 8th Airborne Brigade as the advance landing detachment. It was commanded by Capt M. Ya. Karnaukhov. The battalion's mission was to land in the vicinity of Ozerechnya and support the landing of the corps main body.

At 0400 hours 27 January the Commander of the Western Front informed the Commander of Airborne Forces: "Tell Levashev that horse cavalry of Sokolov's Group has moved into the area which I marked on the map. Therefore the situation is eased for Levashev. Think over the techniques of communication and give the men instructions so that there are no misunderstandings."

The advance airborne detachment was dropped on 27 January. Participants of this drop -- Col A. A. Samsonov, Lt Col (Res) A. P. Aksenov, and the detachment commander himself, Col (Res) M. Ya. Karnaukhov -- relate the following about the detachment's landing and its first operations afterwards.

...The front line. It was the first time that the majority of parachutists of Capt Karnaukhov's detachment had crossed it, let alone being in

¹Sokolov was Commander of the 11th Cavalry Corps.

combat. They listened keenly and alertly, trying to catch the sound of shells bursting and machine guns and submachine guns crackling. The experienced airborne troops -- soldiers of the "winged infantry" -- were calm and at ease. They had had to operate more than once in the enemy rear.

Corps staff officer Capt A. A. Tsvion flew together with his scouts in the lead transport aircraft. From the first days of the war he had spent around three months in enemy rears together with Col Levashev's airborne brigade. It wasn't long after returning that he again put on his parachute and went behind the front lines. The Captain was a genuine master of parachuting. He loved the parachute and knew quite well that it would not let him down. After completing the Odessa Infantry School in 1935, Tsvion was assigned to the young airborne forces and met the war in the 214th Airborne Brigade in Minsk.

Now the Captain was preparing for his 81st combat jump. He was calm. Tsvion had had occasion to be in the most unexpected situations and had looked death in the eye more than once, but each time he had come out the victor. He was always given the most risky jobs. And this time, too, in sending off his scout on a difficult trip, the Corps Commander Gen Levashev gave him the mission, together with Capt Karnaukhov, of seizing the landing area and supporting the reception of the main body of the airborne landing force. Even before take-off, the General needed reliable information about the enemy in the area of the landing. There was a requirement to establish communications with local partisans and the underground Party rayon committee. All this was to be done by Tsvion's scouts and Capt Karnaukhov's advance airborne landing detachment. The General was sure that the mission would be fulfilled.

Dozens of experienced officers, sergeants, and rank and file airborne troops with prewar training and combat experience were on other aircraft.

Suddenly the plane containing Capt Tsvion and the scouts abruptly descended, made a turn to the right, then to the left. The cargo containers at the end of the cabin momentarily began to shift toward the cabin containing the pilots. The penetrating tinkle of broken glass was heard. The wind rushed into the plane. Fine snow settled down.

A hole formed in the roof from shrapnel of an exploding antiaircraft shell. The men in white camouflage cloaks lay on the floor of the aircraft and looked up. Now they saw before them a gloomy, starlit sky, the sliding opaline beams of searchlights, and the light green dotted lines of tracers.

"We are over the front line," yelled the Captain, drowning out the whistle of the wind. "Soon we'll be over target."

The troops began to stir.

The first group of planes was approaching the drop zone. As soon as it had passed the center of what seemed to be an empty field, there sounded in the aircraft the order "Get ready!"

The parachutists rose and crowded closer together and toward the door. They adjusted the parachute harness in a businesslike way and shifted the submachine guns to a more comfortable position under their left arms.

There was a minute's silence. The troopers stood silently and tensely. Capt Tsvion looked over his scouts attentively. Their faces were calm and concentrated.

"Go..."

The parachutists jumped out one after another into the night. Capt Tsvion was the twenty-first to jump.

The jump from the lead transport served as the signal for the rest. Parachutists began to leave the other aircraft right after them. The aircraft approached the center of the field, observing equal time intervals.

The starry sky above the enormous field was covered with dark dots. The troops were approaching the ground. From the air the parachutists could already distinguish square wooded areas and the outlines of farms and villages.

From a low altitude Capt Tsvion noticed people running across the snow toward the landing spot. They were shouting something and waving their hands. "Are those really Germans?" thought the Captain. While in the air, he unfastened his leg straps and pulled out his pistol.

The wind gusted. There was an abrupt shock as he hit the snow. Tsvion pulled his billowing parachute toward him, threw off his harness, and ran toward the bushes to one side. Here he heard Russian words: "Son, son, we're friendly."

A puffing woman embraced the Captain, pressed him to her, saying: "My dear, you're probably frozen?" Warm handshakes, eyes flashing with joy.

"Let's run quickly to the village, you can warm up on some hot tea," invited the woman, looking into the Captain's face.

Tsvion was surrounded by old men, women, and children, who vied with each other in inviting him into their huts. "There are no foul people in our collective farm, they went to the neighboring village," the women hurried to tell the Captain.

The roar of engines could still be heard in the air. The first troops who landed silently located their commanders, collected into subunits, and sought out the skis, explosives, ammunition, and other cargoes dropped by parachute. They were greeted by our Soviet citizens, who tried

to help in any way possible. The omnipresent youngsters in particular bustled about. They knew friendly planes by the sound and ran beyond the outskirts at the moment when the first parachutes were opening in the gloomy sky. The boys ran across the field, helped find the supplies, and showed the parachutists the road to the village.

Soon the entire group of parachutists had gathered about their commander. Soon after landing, it became clear to Tsvion that they had been dropped by mistake in an area not planned before the take-off. According to the name of the village -- Tabory instead of Ozerechnya -- they were about 20 kilometers to the south of their target.

They couldn't lose a minute's time. The remaining forces of the brigade were to land right after them on this night. Their mission was to ensure a good landing on the field according to signs set out by Karnaukhov or Tsvion. What was to be done?

The village of Tabory was full of people. Many collective farm members were armed with Soviet or German rifles or submachine guns. Small groups of people arose everywhere, and in their center there was invariably one of the airborne troops. Men, women and children listened joyfully to their native Russian speech, and themselves spoke without letup. They wanted to find out about Moscow and Leningrad, about the situation at the front, and about how the Soviet people were living and working.

A holiday was declared in this village located far beyond the front. Tea was boiled and potatoes cooked in every hut. The long-awaited guests were treated to everything possible.

Karnaukhov and Tsvion decided to leave a small group in the village of Tabory. It would prepare a temporary field and set out the recognition signals in case the next flight would repeat the error. Early on the morning of 28 January, without waiting for a complete assembly of the detachment and supplies, Karnaukhov and Tsvion led their men to the vicinity of Ozerechnya, where the main body of the landing force was to land.

Thus a large portion of the battalion was dropped south of the designated area. This considerably hindered the assembly of the troops after landing -- four hours after the drop a little more than half of the detachment had assembled. Many of the dropped supplies -- heavy weapons, ammunition, skis, and rations -- could not be found immediately.

The decision of the detachment commander to move with the greater part of his detachment to the village of Ozerechnya was correct, since with no communications either with front headquarters or with corps headquarters he could not report that the detachment was dropped in a different area than that planned. The "Sever" long-distance radio had been dropped far to one side from the area where the commander and staff of the advance airborne landing detachment had touched down. The radio operations could not enter into communications, since the battalion signal officer had the prearranged

message codes. After leaving Tabory and heading north, the detachment with Karnaukhov and Tsvion entered into combat with the enemy for Ozarechnya on the evening of 28 January. Two attacks were beat off by the Hitlerites, and only after the third attack and with the onset of darkness did the detachment burst into the village and completely destroy the Hitlerite garrison in a night battle.

On the whole, the advance detachment did not accomplish its mission, nor did it justify its assignment. This resulted from the fact that it was not dropped in the planned area.

Without communications with the advance detachment, the commander of the 4th Airborne Corps decided to continue to land the 8th Brigade in the vicinity of Ozarechnya. On the night of 28 January the Brigade's 3rd Battalion was dropped partly in the village of Tabory, where airborne troops had set out signals marking the drop zone, and partly in the vicinity of Ozarechnya. Maj A. G. Kobets, Commander of the 3rd Battalion of 8th Airborne Corps, did not wait until the whole battalion was assembled, but headed north to his objective — the Vyaz'ma-Smolensk Highway and rail line. Here the airborne troops put the rail line out of order on the sector Izdeshkovo and Alferovo, attacked enemy transports, and disrupted communications. The parachutists' diversionary activities against the most important lines of communication of the enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping continued for over 20 days. Here is what former Hitlerite officer A. Hofe writes about the operations of Soviet airborne troops in the vicinity west of Vyaz'ma in his book Vnimaniye, parashyutisty! (Attention, Parachutists!):

"...The Russian parachutists who landed held the woods for many days. Laying on pine branches placed directly on the snow and with a temperature of 38 degrees below zero, they beat off all German attacks, which at first bore an improvised nature. Only with the support of German self-propelled guns and dive bombers from Vyaz'ma did we succeed in freeing the road of Russians."¹

In addition to the drop of the 3rd Battalion on the night of 27/28 January, it was planned to land the remaining units of 8th Brigade from the airfields of Grabtsevo and Rzhavets. However as soon as the advance detachment began leaving the Zhashkovo airfield, German aerial reconnaissance discovered our massed transport aviation and troops on the airfields. Soon thereafter came a bombing strike against the Grabtsevo airfield just before take-off of our transports. The air defense facilities covering the area of Kaluga proved ineffective against the German aircraft. The enemy air strike against Grabtsevo destroyed seven TB-3 aircraft and a fuel dump. Several planes were damaged, and there were killed and wounded among personnel of the transport aviation and the 8th Airborne Brigade. The landing operation was ceased at this field, but work continued on this and following

¹A. Hofe, Vnimaniye, parashyutisty!, Moscow, Foreign Literature Publishing House, 1961, p. 22.

nights from other airfields, in spite of the opposition of night fighters in the air and a constant threat of possible strikes against the fields.



Airborne troops "at work"

In the six days from 27 January through 2 February only the 8th Airborne Brigade (less one battalion), or less than 25 percent of the corps strength (around 2,100 men) was landed.¹

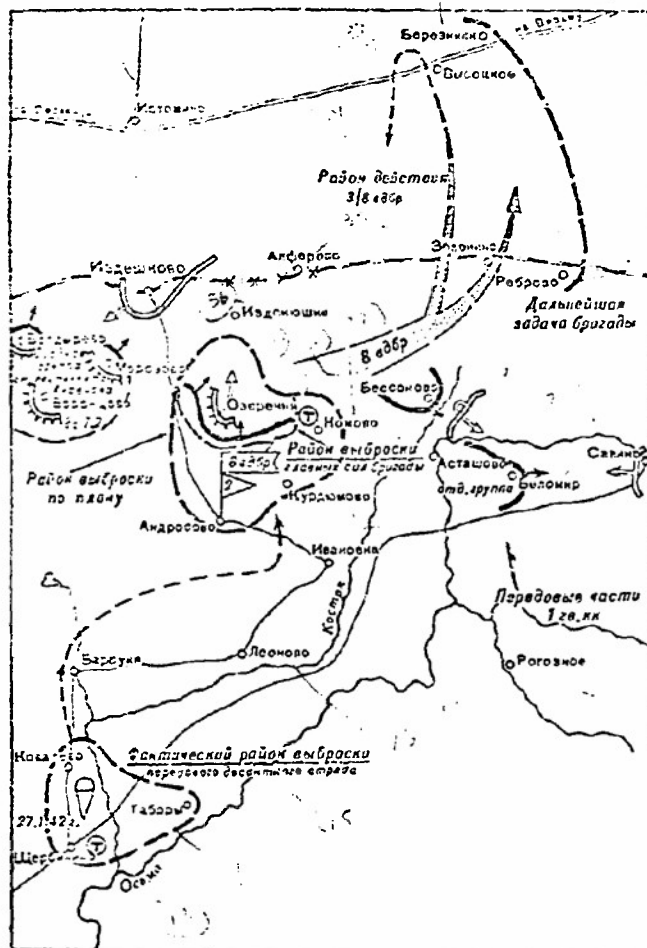
Further landing operations by the 4th Airborne Corps were considered inadvisable. The corps returned to Moskovskaya Oblast from the vicinity of Kaluga less the dropped units of 8th Airborne Brigade.

After landing, the 8th Airborne Brigade operated for some time independently in the rear of the Vyaz'ma Grouping, and then on 6 February moved into the area of combat operations of Gen P. A. Belov's 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. After breaking through the enemy defenses on the Warsaw Highway, this Corps moved in the direction of Vyaz'ma. On orders of the Commander of the Western Front, the airborne troops were included in the Corps.

On 7 February the Commander of 8th Airborne Brigade, Lt Col A. A. Onufriyev, received the following order from the Commander of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps: "...advance in an easterly direction with all forces of 8th Abn Brigade and take Gredyakino (on the rail line), interdict the Vyaz'ma to Izdeshkovo rail line and prevent movement of enemy trains, enter into communications with 75th kd /kavaleriyskaya diviziya; cavalry division/ advancing to the east of Gredyakino and with Sokolov (11th Cavalry Corps), about which I wrote you previously."²

¹See *Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945*, v. 2, p. 327.

²USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, fond 253, opis' 2754, delo 44, list 182.



Combat operations of the advance airborne detachment of 8th
Airborne Brigade in January-February 1942

KEY: 1. Istomino; 2. to Smolensk; 3. Izdeshkovo; 4. Boldyrevo;
5. Sr Lt Aksenov's composite group; 6. Vorontsovo; 7. Morozovo; 8. planned
drop zone; 9. Androsovo; 10. Barsuki; 11. Kovalevo; 12. Shcherbinino;
13. Os'ma River; 14. Tabor; 15. Actual drop zone of the advance airborne
detachment; 16. Leonovo; 17. Kostrya; 18. Rogoznoye; 19. Advance units of
1st Guards Cavalry Corps; 20. Ivanovka; 21. Kurdyumovo; 22. Savino; 23. Belo-
mir; 24. separate group; 25. Astashovo; 26. Drop zone of Brigade's main body;
27. Bessonovo; 28. Subsequent Brigade mission; 29. Rebrovo; 30. Zelenino;
31. to Vyaz'ma; 32. Berezniki; 33. Vysotskoye; [Legend continued next page]

34. Drop zone of 3rd Bn 8th Abn Brigade; 35. Alferovo; 36. Izdenyushka; 37. Komovo; 38. 8th Abn Brigade; 39. Ozerechnya.

In carrying out the assigned mission, the airborne troops liberated populated points in fierce battles and destroyed enemy garrisons and headquarters.

The situation report of Gen Belov's headquarters for 10 February stated that the 8th Airborne Brigade took up the defense of the area Marmonovo and Dyaglevo after heavy fighting for Pesochnya and Staroye Polyanovo. Brigade losses were 140 killed and wounded. Brigade subunits destroyed the headquarters of 5th Panzer Division, of 1st Battalion of the 13th Motorized Rifle Regiment, and of the 176th Artillery Regiment of 5th Panzer Division. Over 200 vehicles were captured.

Together with partisans, the airborne troops surrounded the city of Dorogobuzh and took Ozerishche, Maksimovo, Myasniki, and the Aleksino Sovkhoz.

The Brigade Commander, Lt Col A. A. Onufriyev, and Brigade Commissar, Regimental Commissar I. V. Raspopov, proved to be persistent and full of initiative in achieving assigned goals. They deservedly enjoyed great authority not only among their subordinates, but among the senior commanders as well.

All airborne troops displayed a high state of combat skill, initiative, bravery, and courage. Here is one of the many instructive and interesting examples.

A group of airborne troops commanded by Jr Political Officer Varzakov, a Company Commissar of the 1st Battalion of 8th Airborne Brigade, landed to the east of Dorogobuzh, far from the drop zone of the main landing force. In moving eastward to link up with their brigade, they attacked the enemy by surprise several times, destroying transport and small garrisons and disrupting communications.

On the night of 31 January/1 February, Varzakov's group approached the village of Yurkino. The troops captured a soldier from this garrison and learned from him the nature of the village's defenses, the placement of weapons, and the challenge and reply. The translator Vasil'yev was sent into Yurkino. On the edge of the village a sentry stopped him, asked for the password, and, satisfied by the answer, asked for a smoke. A conversation began, during which Vasil'yev checked the information given by the prisoner and clarified certain questions of interest to the commander of the airborne group.

With a sudden blow of a knife, Vasil'yev killed the sentry and threw his body off the road into the snow. Taking to the road with a German sub-machine gun across his chest, he gave a signal with a flashlight and called the group of troops to him. No sooner had they emerged from the woods and

headed for the road when a German officer appeared before Vasil'yev. What was he to do? A shot would alarm the garrison. At this time the silhouettes of the airborne troops appeared in the darkness on the road. Vasil'yev turned toward them, pretending that he was going to open fire on them. The German officer (a Captain) came up, became excited, and began to point in the direction of the group moving along the road. Vasil'yev whispered for him to lie down, and he crouched down himself. The officer did so, and the resourceful trooper silently dispatched the Hitlerite. The group came up just at this moment and, having discussed the plan of further action, began its work.

Each trooper was given one or two houses in which enemy soldiers were sleeping. Everything was over in a few minutes. Grenades and point-blank fire did the job. A few Hitlerites succeeded in escaping from the village.

Three days later Varzakov's group linked up with brigade units after destroying a supply convoy and 15 guards.

...Lt Col N. I. Sagaydachnyy, Chief of Staff of the 8th Airborne Brigade, attacked the town of Androsovo from the move right after landing with a small group of parachutists, before the enemy had time to collect his wits. Panic spread in the enemy garrison. Taking advantage of the darkness, the Hitlerites ran from the houses into the street and came under the accurate fire of the airborne troops. Soon they understood their mistake, but it was too late. The parachutists took the town and went on the defensive. However the forces were too uneven -- 20 men against a Hitlerite battalion.

For a day the Soviet soldiers fought a hard battle in complete encirclement, holding onto several houses. The structures in which the troops were defending were burned one after another, but the heroic soldiers, led by Party member Sagaydachnyy, supported each other with fire and continued to fight, causing the enemy perceptible losses. The Hitlerites opened up with artillery against the houses. They suggested that the troops surrender, promising that their lives would be spared, but they continued to fight while they could and almost all had perished.

Several seriously wounded parachutists, including Lt Col Sagaydachnyy, and all men captured in the town were bestially tortured by the Hitlerites.

On 24 September 1967, in the village of Put'kovo not far from the former rayon center of Izdeshkovo in Smolenskaya Oblast, a rally was held by veterans of the 8th Airborne Brigade. Among those who came were former Brigade Commissar I. V. Raspopov, his wife Nataliya Ivanovna -- a radio operator, Brigade Scout Lt Col A. F. Aksenov, the wife of Sagaydachnyy -- Galina Andreyevna with two sons, Lt Col V. F. Kozinets, and many others. After a meeting attended by many people there was a ceremonious unveiling of a monument on the grave of Sagaydachnyy's group of parachutists, and of an obelisk at the site of the landing of Brigade troopers in January 1942. For several days the veterans met with the local populace in schools, kolkhozes, and enterprises. There were many warm, happy, unforgettable meetings of those who jumped into the enemy rear with those who were not afraid for their own

lives and who gave all possible assistance to the parachutists and together with them destroyed the Hitlerite invaders.

The Corps Receives A New Mission

In the first half of February 1942 the Vyaz'ma center of German defense was in the center of attention both of the Soviet and of the Hitlerite command. Loss of Vyaz'ma would have been appreciable for Group of Armies "Center". For this reason the Germans tried to hold this area at any cost. The battles here took on a protracted nature.

The command of Group of Armies "Center" brought reserves into the vicinity of Vyaz'ma and Yukhnov and in their turn began active operations. The grouping of Soviet forces fighting in the vicinity of Vyaz'ma was in a difficult situation.

Only a decisive defeat of the enemy in the vicinity of Yukhnov by forces of Forty-Third, Forty-Ninth, and Fiftieth armies could alter the situation on the Vyaz'ma sector of the front. However the armies did not carry out this mission. The exhaustion of the troops, who had been constantly advancing for two months, and serious stoppages in supplies of ammunition, rations, and fodder had an effect. Transportation could not handle the supply under conditions of snowdrifts.¹

The offensive of the Western and Kalinin fronts at the end of January had no essential success. Units of 11th Cavalry Corps reached the Vyaz'ma to Smolensk Superhighway, but did not succeed in hindering the movement of enemy troops.

After successfully penetrating the enemy defense with three divisions, Thirty-Third Army moved a considerable distance forward in a narrow strip in the direction of Vyaz'ma, but soon the Hitlerites succeeded in closing that sector of penetration and these divisions were forced to do heavy fighting in encirclement.

There was a difficult situation in the area south and southwest of Vyaz'ma, where forces of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps were operating jointly with the airborne troops of Onufriyev and Soldatov and with Smolensk partisans. Corps units tried to break through in a northerly direction to link up with forces of 11th Cavalry Corps, but they did not succeed in this, due to inadequate strength in the Corps, the absence of tanks, and a deficiency of artillery and ammunition.

On 10 February the General Headquarters transferred the 4th Airborne Corps to the Western Front. On this day the Corps received the mission of making a landing to the west of Yukhnov, breaking through the enemy defenses from the rear in the direction of Klyuchi and taking the successive positions

¹See Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945, v. 2, p. 327.

of Kurakino, Podsoosenki, Klyuchi, and Leonova; and subsequently moving to the Warsaw Highway 25-30 kilometers southwest of Yukhnov and joining up with units of Fiftieth Army for joint operations against the German Yukhnov Grouping. The Corps included the 9th and 214th airborne brigades and a battalion of 8th Airborne Brigade.

At the same time Fiftieth Army received the mission of advancing to meet the airborne force and taking the area of Babykino, Klyuchi, and Pesochnya.

The decision to employ the 4th Airborne Corps in the Yukhnov offensive operation by troops of the left wing of the Western Front was undoubtedly advisable and answered the operational situation which had arisen in the middle of February.

A special air transport group was formed to land the Corps under the new mission. This time, too, it had few aircraft -- a total of 64 PS-84 and TB-3 planes.

It was planned to land the corps from the Lyubertsy and Vnukovo airfields near Moscow.

A field east of the town of Zhelan'ye was picked as the center of the drop zone. Here Kirillov's partisan detachment was operating. The plan for the night landing foresaw six trips per aircraft over a period of three nights, two trips a night.

The landing plan provided for the preliminary dispatch into the drop zone by plane of a support group with three radio homing stations. The group was to be met by the commander of the partisan detachment. However this was not done, for technical reasons.

The command of airborne troops, which directed the landing, strictly cautioned the aircraft crews of their personal responsibility for accuracy in dropping each group of parachutists. As a result, many aircraft crews returned to their airfields without having accomplished the mission in those cases where the signals set out on the ground caused some doubt. This led to a disruption of the schedule of flights and to repeated sorties by a considerable number of aircraft.

The enemy aviation did not strike the airfields from which the landing force was taking off, but it greatly increased its activity in the air along the routes of the transport aircraft and over the drop zone.

Bomber aviation delivered strikes against the landing areas of the parachutists. These actions by enemy aviation complicated the conduct of the landing and led to a loss, although small, in the airborne force and transport aircraft.

The 4th Battalion of 8th Airborne Brigade jumped first on the night of 17/18 February, and units of the 9th and 214th airborne brigades jumped on the following nights.

The commander and staff of the 4th Airborne Corps landed on the night of 22/23 February. They proceeded to the drop zone in one aircraft, which was a great error. The plane was attacked by a German night fighter over the drop zone, as a result of which the Corps Commander, Maj Gen A. F. Levashov, was killed and several staff officers were wounded. Chief of Staff Col A. F. Kazankin took command of the Corps.

Landing of Corps units was fully completed on this night. A total of over 10,000 men (counting the previously landed units of the 8th Airborne Brigade) and 1,500 light cargo parachute bags were dropped into the enemy rear.

Landing of the 9th and 214th airborne brigades, as well as Corps units and subunits from the Moscow airfields was performed without enemy air activity against the initial area of the landing operation.

The enemy was able to offer resistance to the landing with his aircraft only in the drop area of the airborne landing force. The losses in aircraft and personnel along flight routes from antiaircraft artillery fire were insignificant. The airborne troops suffered many more losses as a result of the inaccurate drops caused by their own transport aircraft. As before, this time too there were cases where men and supplies were dropped over a great area -- in the area of operations of troops of Thirty-Third Army, of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, and even beyond the Dnieper. Losses of supplies considerably lowered the combat effectiveness of the airborne landing force, especially the loss of skis, which deprived many subunits of mobility.

Some of the parachutists, after landing outside their drop zone, joined units of Thirty-Third Army and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps. Others joined the partisans or organized partisan detachments and operated independently in the enemy rear for a long time. There were around 1,800 such troopers. There were cases where parachutists and supplies were dropped into enemy combat formations. In beating off the enemy, they fought to the last cartridge and inflicted losses on the Hitlerites.

The basic cause of imprecision in dropping men and supplies was the fact that the drop zone was not provided with radiotechnical homing equipment. Without this, it was difficult for flight personnel to find the parachutists' drop zone at night, especially in bad weather.

The bonfires and blazes employed as light signals could not be reliable orientation points for the pilots when fighting was going on in the enemy rear, since they could be observed in many places. Another essential defect of the landing was the fact that many crews of the transports were carrying out such a mission for the first time under such difficult conditions.

36. Peskova; 37. Medvedevo; 38. Temkino; 39. Aleksandrovka; 40. Teterino; 41. Units of 33rd Army; 42. Isakovo Station; 43. Vyaz'ma; 44. 5th Tank Division and other units; 45. Ugryumovo Station; 46. Moskva River; 47. Vnukovo; 48. Moscow; 49. Lyubertsy; 50. Initial area for landing of 4th Airborne Brigade; 51. permanent station of 4th Abn Brigade; 52. Medyn'; 53. Conventional signs: drop (landing) zone; partisan area of operations; direction of joint operations by Fiftieth Army and 4th Airborne Corps.

After landing, the 4th Airborne Corps operated in the rectangular area Vyaz'ma, Dorogobuzh, Yel'nya, and Yukhnov. This area was crossed by rail lines and highways, as well as by the lateral rail line Vyaz'ma-Kirov which had great operational significance.

The terrain in the area of combat operations of the airborne landing force was very broken, with numerous swamps. In winter the country roads were impassable for motor vehicles. Movement of units of the Corps was very difficult with no roads, without skis, and over forested terrain.

The brigades' assembly areas were as follows: forest in the vicinity of Gryada (5 kilometers southeast of Zhelan'ye) for the 214th Airborne Brigade, and Svintsovo (4 kilometers south of Zhelan'ye) for the 9th Airborne Brigade.

It was planned to drop the parachutists from a height of 600 meters, but in actuality they were dropped from 1000-2000 meters from most of the aircraft. This led to a great dispersal of parachutists and at night it made it difficult for even small groups to assemble, let alone find the supplies.

Since the drop was made not from a formation, but from individual aircraft, assembly on the ground was done in small groups, which later moved to the battalion and brigade assembly points. Assembly of personnel and collection of supplies was hindered by the deep snow, the lack of roads, the forested terrain, and the imprecise drop of the men.

Before 23 February, and simultaneously with the continuing landing operation, corps units massed in assembly areas, sought out the dropped supplies, and reconnoitered the enemy. Assembly of the airborne landing force was completed by the end of 23 February.

From the first night that the airborne troops appeared in their rear, the Hitlerites began to reinforce their garrisons and defensive structures. Many buildings in populated points were adapted for firing points, and ice trenches and various obstacles were built. The garrisons were reinforced with tanks and artillery.

The situation which arose made it necessary for units of the 4th Airborne Corps to stay a long while in the enemy rear. This in turn meant that they essentially became ordinary light rifle units and partisan detachments. Moreover, this placed the troopers in a difficult situation, since they had neither supply bases nor their own rear service organizations for

supporting units in extended combat operations. The lack of artillery and tanks and weak air support by front aviation did not help the airborne force in the successful accomplishment of a number of complicated combat missions. Therefore the enemy frequently turned out to be stronger than the airborne force and forced it to limit itself to defensive actions.

Toward Troops Of Fiftieth Army

After taking command of the Corps, Col A. F. Kazankin contacted the brigades and the Commander of Fiftieth Army after landing.

By the time the landing was over and by the beginning of combat operations by the Corps (23-25 February), troops of Fiftieth Army came up to the Warsaw Highway on a line Sapovo, Savinki and met stubborn enemy resistance which they could not overcome.

Having studied the results of the landing and estimating the situation Col Kazankin defined the unit missions, which basically remained the same as before take-off.

On the night of 23/24 February the 9th Airborne Brigade, commanded by Col I. I. Kuryshv, destroyed individual minor enemy garrisons while advancing and approached the populated points of Prechistoye and Kurakino, where it was halted by heavy enemy fire from the direction of Yekaterinovka and Pesochnya. One of the companies captured Verterkhovo Station with a surprise attack. The 214th Airborne Brigade commanded by Lt Col N. Ye. Kolobovnikov had no success in trying to capture from the move the enemy strong points in Ivantsevo, Kostinki, and Zherdovka in the course of the night. Its subunits suffered losses and were forced to withdraw to their initial position, and only on the day of 24 February did they take Tat'yanino.

During the night of 24/25 February Corps units made reconnaissance raids, improved their occupied positions, and prepared to make repeated attacks on the strong points in front of which they were halted. They also regrouped separate subunits. As a result of fighting done on the night of 23/24 February it was established that the enemy had particularly strongly dug in in Zherdovka, Ivantsevo, Pesochnya, Klyuchi, and Dertovaya.

The sole means for suppressing enemy resistance which the airborne troops had was fire from small arms and mortars. However this, too, could not be intensive due to the limited amount of ammunition. With a small number of battalion mortars and a limited number of rounds for them, it was difficult to count on reliable suppression of strong points and enemy centers of resistance. This is why the Corps operations were possible only at night under these conditions.

The deficiency in artillery and mortars and the lack of support by front aviation were compensated by surprise night attacks, close-range fire, and the blows of silent weapons in hand to hand combat.

The Corps had no less than five enemy infantry regiments in front of it, belonging to the 131st, 34th, and 31st infantry divisions. They were situated in populated points which had been adapted for defense. These regiments occupied fortified positions. They were reinforced with artillery and supported by bomber aviation.

Thus from its very first day of combat operations the Corps met with organized enemy defense on its entire front of advance. This enemy defense grew stronger, because the landing and assembly of units of the airborne landing force dragged on for a long time. The enemy determined the intentions and directions of thrusts of troops of the 4th Airborne Corps and Fiftieth Army and immediately began to bring additional forces into their zone of operations.

In spite of the fact that units of the 4th Airborne Corps had neither numerical superiority nor heavy weapons, they nevertheless advanced 20-22 kilometers toward their front line troops on individual axes. They took a number of populated points and inflicted considerable losses on the enemy. In fighting for the Derbyanskiy and Subbotniki sidings they captured seven platforms with aerial bombs, one car loaded with ammunition, a rations warehouse, many infantry weapons, and other supplies.

The fighting for these rail sidings and Ugra Station showed that the Germans attached great importance to the Vyaz'ma-Kirov lateral railroad, and had strong garrisons at all points on the line.

The important enemy strong points in the axis of advance of the Corps were the populated points of Pesochnya and Klyuchi, the seizure of which would open the route to Astapovo and Lyudkovo for link-up with forces of Fiftieth Army. The Klyuchi strong point was an important rear area road junction, through which passed supply routes to the front having importance for enemy units defending along the Warsaw Highway. Like Pesochnya, Klyuchi was a heavily fortified strong point with dugout shelters, communicating trenches, and a snow rampart surrounding it.

The town of Klyuchi had full command over the terrain. From the air it resembled a large saddle. From Klyuchi came several roads linking this heavily fortified point with a large garrison guarding the approaches to the Warsaw Highway, which was an important main road for the Germans.

The airborne troops knew that it would be difficult to take Klyuchi. They beat the Hitlerites out of this populated point after a difficult and bloody battle. In the fighting for Klyuchi it was not only the soldiers and commanders of attacking units who showed courage and heroism, but also the workers of service elements, although this concept was very relative in operations in the enemy rear. Here is one of the examples.

Heavy fighting was going on for Klyuchi. The medical service chief, Medical Officer 2d Rank A. V. Isayev, remained all the time in the combat formations of units assaulting Klyuchi. Lt Petrov, a close friend of the

Doctor, was in front with his company. Before the battle he said to Isayev as he passed him: "If something happens, I'll only go under your knife."

"Don't worry," Isayev shouted after him, "my hand won't shake."

When two houses standing on a knoll on the edge of town had been taken from the fascists and the soldiers had rushed on farther, Isayev decided to immediately set up a medical station in one of them.

The aid men quickly took apart the plank beds set up by the Germans and began to construct an operating table. At this time the window frames flew out with a whine: a mine had exploded right near the hut. Isayev was wounded when a mine fragment hit him in the side. With the help of the aid men the doctor began to bind himself up, but lost consciousness before he finished...

There were instances where a young parachutist was a bit afraid in taking off in an airship for the first time to make a jump. Then Isayev would point to his emblem and say: "I've jumped 70 times, and I'm not afraid." And gently patting the youth on the shoulder, he would continue with feigned severity: "Well get going. Everything will be all right. I'm first, and you're after me." And immediately the fright would be gone.

...Isayev lay unconscious on the floor. The aid men quickly bandaged him and carried him to the next room, where they cautiously placed him on the table. One hurriedly repaired the room with boards and stopped up the windows with coarse canvas. At the same time others already began receiving the wounded. They applied small dressings, but mostly persuaded and reassured the men.

"But what are we to do without a doctor?" said a rather young aid man in desperation. It was the shaggy lad called Vasya.

"Well, brother, this isn't Moscow. It isn't the 'big front.' You can't call to a hospital. The one you jumped with will take care of you," responded an experienced trooper. "We'll wait a bit and send for another doctor. Perhaps he's free."

Aid man Vasya remained to look after the doctor, who had already regained consciousness. Before he had only moved his lips with difficulty, and had spoken in a delirium about his wife living in Leningrad and not wishing to leave there.

Soon the badly wounded were brought in. Their groans forced the doctor to open his eyes. He listened, and on his parched lips appeared a sad smile. He asked for water. After several big, greedy gulps, he tried to arise. The aid man supported him.

Asking for his instruments, the doctor went to the wounded. It became quiet in the room. The men were ashamed of their groans. They

understood that this wounded man with the burning eyes would now operate on them. The aid men looked at Isayev with quiet admiration.

Isayev began operating. With a colossal effort of will he forced himself to forget about his own tormenting pain. He felt nothing, saw nothing, except the injured area on the body of a wounded man. The operation was successful, then one more, and another... Shaken to the depths of their souls, the soldiers followed every movement of Isayev's dexterous, confident hands...

When Isayev had completed his sixth operation, the door of the hut burst open noisily. Two airborne aid men carried in Lt Petrov, who had been wounded in the stomach. At the sight of his friend lying motionless on the stretcher, Isayev was shaken. He knew that Petrov's life was in his hands, but his strength was already giving out.

Isayev's eyes became bloodshot from the tension. A large lock of raven-black hair fell down on the cold, sweaty forehead. Clenching his teeth, calling on all his professional experience for help, and mastering himself by inhuman effort, Isayev began to operate on his friend, saying only: "My hand won't tremble, as I promised you, my friend!"

When the operation was about over and only the last stitch had to be made, Isayev dropped his instruments, staggered, and fell in a dead faint. He died, but he saved seven lives that day...

The next day the enemy brought in a bombing strike on Klyuchi from the air. Fascist aircraft made six raids on the town, while simultaneously the enemy employed massed artillery and mortar fire. After the air raids and the artillery preparation, elite SS units moved on the town accompanied by tanks. But it was the law of the airborne troops to stand to the death. That which has been taken must not be given up!

A bloody battle developed. Lt Batenko, who was defending an important sector, had 30 men. He placed some of the men in a small fir grove, through which passed a country road, and left a small group to defend the approaches to the road. He himself remained in a house and cleverly placed a sniper in the attic.

No fewer than 200 Hitlerites besieged them. In spite of heavy losses from the troopers' withering fire, they rose to their full height and again madly attacked. The airborne troops fought heroically in defending each clump of soil.

During this uneven battle a group of the SS troops made a deep envelopment, got into the rear of the airborne troops' defenses, and began to surround the house. The lieutenant and the sniper continued to fire from the house at the enemy attempting to attack from the flanks... But neither one noticed -- and anyway it was difficult to notice -- how a large group of fascists were creeping up from the rear. A minute later, and grenades flew in through the windows. The firing ceased from the house.

The fascists waited awhile, then decided to occupy the house and hit the airborne troops defending the road in the back.

The wounded Batenko stood in the passage by the door. He could already clearly hear voices and the crunch of snow -- this was the fascists making a run for the house.

Batenko waited. He didn't feel the blood slowly seeping through the bandage of the hastily wrapped wound. He was tormented by the thought of why the sniper was silent. "Is he still alive? If he is, it's good that he is quiet..."

The door was jerked open.

"Russian swine, you're surrounded. Surrender!"

Batenko swore and tossed two grenades one after another, then threw himself to the floor and prepared to fire. At this moment he heard three booming explosions and the even chatter of an automatic rifle...

That meant sniper K. Kononov was alive. He heard cries and groaning. Several fascists were left sprawled on the snow, while the others hurriedly crawled away from the house.

Then fascist tanks appeared, and behind them soldiers. This was the last attack by the Hitlerite invaders.

The forward tank conducted intense fire. The commander assigned the mission to the crew of an antitank rifle headed by Sgt Zakolyukin: don't let the tanks through at any cost. The crew was on the edge of the forest, and the tanks were moving along the road. Now the black monsters with the fascist swastika were already quite close... Zakolyukin gave the order: "Fire!"

The forward tank stopped and the fascists dropped to the ground. A second one halted behind it. The airborne troops attacked so as to cut the infantry off from the tanks. They rushed forward so quickly that Zakolyukin's crew could no longer fire on a tank without risk of hitting their own men.

The Hitlerites began to roll back, but a surviving tank wanted to hook onto the damaged ones and tow them away. Zakolyukin rose to his full height and gave the order: "Get away from the tanks. I'll hit it!"

Having accomplished their mission, the airborne troops began to pursue the retreating infantry and chase it further from the town. Zakolyukin entered into solitary combat with the third tank. Batenko, who was directing the battle, decided to assist the PTR /*protivotankovoye ruzh'ye*; antitank rifle/ crew, but the enemy was crafty. They set up an ambush and tried to capture the commander after cutting him off from the soldiers. The lieutenant was again wounded, and his submachine gun was knocked from his hands. He returned the fire from his pistol...



Airborne sniper K. Konovalov

times he felt his strength ebbing and his eyes being covered by a hazy film. Col Kazankin twice ordered Batenko to go to the hospital, but the Lieutenant did not leave the battlefield.

When reinforcements came and the fascists had been chased off, the wounded Lieutenant, together with the soldiers, gathered his last strength to raise the dead Simonenov, carefully lay him in the sled, and pulled him away to pay him his last debt...

Thus on the night of 26/27 February the 9th Airborne Brigade took Klyuchi after a three-hour battle. Only a small group of Hitlerites succeeded in breaking out of the ring of fire, and the rest were killed or taken prisoner. The enemy lost over 600 soldiers and officers in killed alone. Up to two infantry battalions and an infantry regimental headquarters were destroyed and trophies were captured, including 50 horses, very much needed at that moment, 200 wagons and sleighs, and many other supplies.

While pursuing the remnants of the smashed enemy garrison, which was withdrawing in the direction of Malyshevka on the morning of 27 February, the 9th Brigade was subjected to heavy air strikes and infantry counterattacks supported by artillery. For this reason it was forced to cease the pursuit and take up the defense of Klyuchi.

As a result of fighting on 23-28 February, units of 4th Airborne Corps moved to the position indicated by the command of the Western Front, where they were to meet troops of Fiftieth Army. But since the Army was held up by increased enemy resistance and did not move to the position indicated, the Corps took up a temporary defense of the area Klyuchi, Tynovka, Yurkino, Petrishcheva, Novaya, and Verterkhovo Station. It did this after considerable losses, without artillery and with a limited amount of ammunition, so

as to regroup and be replenished with ammunition and supplies.

Since the operations of the 4th Airborne Corps and Fiftieth Army threatened the very important lines of communication of the enemy Yuhnov Grouping and could lead to its destruction, the German command urgently removed new units and large units from other axes or moved them from the rear to combat the airborne landing force.

By 5 March units of 4th Airborne Brigade had been resupplied with ammunition and rations, had brought themselves in order, and evacuated their wounded from the area of combat operations. With its limited number of personnel the Corps not only held a 35-kilometer front, but also simultaneously conducted diversionary actions along roads, mined some sectors, and made raids on transport, depots, and small enemy garrisons. The actions of small diversionary and reconnaissance detachments usually gave positive results.

However the situation at the front by this time had become very unfavorable. Fiftieth Army ceased its advance, advance divisions of Thirty-Third Army were surrounded by the enemy, and the attacks of units of 11th and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps in the direction of Vyaz'ma were unsuccessful. Troops of the Western Front moved into the defense.



Mission accomplished

Under these conditions, further operations by 4th Airborne Corps consisted of firmly holding the captured area and in constant disruption of the control and operation of the enemy rear. At the same time, the Corps was in readiness, on receipt of a new mission, to continue the attack on a new axis in coordination with front units.

March-April

According to the plan of operation, the airborne landing force was to have conducted combat operations for no more than two or three days. Based on this, the force's service and support organization was planned accordingly. It was in no sense calculated on extended combat operations by the Corps in isolation from front troops.

As a result of the protracted fighting, the Corps command was faced with various problems of supplies and medical support, reinforcements, new weapons, etc.

The local populace and restored organs of Soviet power in areas freed by Kazankin's troops and Belov's horse cavalry gave great assistance to the airborne troops in solving problems of material and medical support. Of course, the trophies captured from the enemy were fully utilized: weapons, ammunition, rations. The Corps command was forced to use its men to set up supernumerary rear service organs and make local procurements, using the local populace for this.

Peaceful life was constantly intertwined with everyday combat in the area captured by the troops. The people were always ready for either work or combat.

...The enemy was conducting exhausting artillery fire, but Quartermaster Technician Matyushkin was grinding flour with the soldiers and girls of the kolkhoz: "We're supposed to have cakes tomorrow."

There is much work for a manager operating in the enemy rear. He has neither warehouses, nor supply bases, nor repair shops, nor laundries, nor baths. But soldiers must be fed, people must wash, and clean underwear must be given out. Here one must be very resourceful.

Matyushkin knew all this quite well and therefore did not put work off, but went at it immediately.

Taking two men with him, he set off for the town of Bogorodetskoye for produce. He was on a rather bad nag, which was harnessed to a large sledge, and was already imagining himself bringing in produce, preparing a good dinner for the airborne troops, and how the boys would be satisfied and would perhaps be thankful to him. Those were his dreams, but they were interrupted by driver Geras'kin, who in spite of all regulations poked his com-
mander in the side.

"Why are you so quiet? I thought you had fallen asleep. I called you twice, but you didn't answer," said Geras'kin guiltily, and pointed in the direction of the forest, from which wagons were moving.

"Who could be going here? Could it be our men on five wagons? Or perhaps the partisans?"

When Matyushkin raised the binoculars to his eyes, he saw that they were fascists, two men on each wagon. He took the reins from the driver, gave the bay its head, and turned off the road to the right between two large trees. He couldn't turn back. He had people to feed.

"So that the fascists don't see and understand that this is an ambush, you will operate from this side. Just don't walk, but crawl across the road. Don't open fire without my signal. I'll fire on the forward one, and you on the rear one. Understand?" he asked Geras'kin. Then he gave him his sub-machine gun, leaving himself a light machine gun.

The first wagon was already appearing from around the turn. Matyushkin let the supply vehicle come up 30-40 meters and opened fire. Geras'kin helped him. The ones riding on the first and last wagons didn't get up. One of the fascists on the other wagon grabbed a submachine gun and tried to open fire, but Matyushkin adroitly cut him down with a burst.

The "rear area operation" continued some three minutes, and 11 Hitlerites remained lying by the road. One was taken prisoner. The wagons on which they had been riding were full of provisions stolen in the towns.

"That's good," thought Matyushkin, "we didn't have to go far. We got the provisions, killed some Germans, took a prisoner, and in addition we'll bring home some horses. And also there are trophies: 12 rifles, 11 submachine guns. All this is fine," he calculated in his managerial way.

That's how the procurers worked that day...

In the first half of March the supply of the Corps and evacuation of sick and wounded by air were to a great degree put in order. However there were frequent long interruptions in air deliveries due to unfavorable weather, increased enemy night fighter activity, and a lack of transports.

In the first half of March Corps units were forced to repulse almost unceasing enemy attacks made with the support of tanks and dive bombers. As a result, on 11 March the airborne troops left the towns of Andronovo and Yurkino. Further enemy efforts were directed toward seizure of the area of Novaya and Tat'yanino, which had great significance for the Corps inasmuch as they were in the center of the zone of advance of the Corps.

By this same time the main grouping of the enemy 131st Infantry Division had massed in the area of Podsosenki, Kostinki, Ivantseva, and Leonova with the aim of further advancing in the direction of Novaya and Verterkhovo

Station. The 449th Infantry Regiment, operating in the area of Dertovaya and Andronovo, was attached as reinforcement for this division.

Both sides remained in this situation until 18 March, waging combat with variable success. At the same time, the enemy kept bringing new units into the area of operations of the 4th Airborne Corps. For example, the 107th Infantry Regiment of 34th Infantry Division appeared. According to prisoners, the Regiment was specially moved from the vicinity of Yukhnov to reinforce units bent on destruction of the airborne landing force.

In front of the Corps front the Germans set up a strip of obstacles and fortified areas consisting of mine fields, snow trenches, ice ramparts, and earth-and-timber pillboxes. In addition, they had antiaircraft and field artillery, tanks, searchlights for illuminating the terrain during a night battle, while the Corps had none of these means.

On 18 March major forces of Hitlerites supported by tanks and artillery attacked, and then took Pushkino after stubborn fighting. The 4th Battalion of 214th Airborne Brigade, which was defending this point, withdrew only when only 30 men remained in the Battalion.

At the same time the enemy attacked the town of Borodino, which was held by the airborne forces only with difficulty, and then waged fierce battles for Tynovka, Gorbachi, and Klyuchi. The enemy deeply wedged into the Corps area with advance units in the vicinity east of Kurakino, but could not exploit the success. He was stopped and suffered heavy losses.

Numerous facts speak of the heroism of the airborne forces displayed in the March defensive battles. Here is one of them.

On the morning of 18 March 1942 a small group of airborne troops headed by Jr Political Officer V. S. Ulitchev was waging an uneven battle on the edge of the town of Kurakino.

In the heat of battle a messenger delivered a report to the command post of the commander of the 9th Airborne Brigade, Col I. I. Kuryshch. It read: "Fascist aircraft are continuing raids on the town. At the same time the Hitlerites are conducting artillery and mortar fire. Tanks have not yet appeared. There have not yet been any of our planes, artillery, or tanks, but the town is and will remain Soviet. There is not and will not be room for one living fascist. We will die, but the vipers will not get through. Ulitchev."

As the Colonel was reading this report, seven tanks followed by infantry moved toward the southern outskirts of the town.

The Jr Political Officer turned to his combat comrades with the words: "There are six of us, and for now there are seven enemy tanks. They must be stopped. Remember that our hospital is two kilometers away. There are wounded comrades there. If we give up the position, the tanks will crush them. We will stand to the death."

The parachutists began fighting. A fascist tank headed directly for Ulitchev's foxhole. The distance closed quickly, and only some five meters remained... Molotov cocktails flew at the vehicle, and the burning hulk crawled over Ulitchev. He managed to throw a bundle of grenades after it. An explosion was heard, and the tank was halted.

All troops in the group acted skillfully and courageously. Komsomol member Klyuyev blinded an enemy crew with machine gun bursts against the vision slits of a tank. The vehicle clumsily trundled into a trench and was immediately set afire. Parachutist Puzanov set a third tank on fire. Anti-tank rifleman Bizyayev knocked out two tanks with a PTR. Though seriously wounded in both arms, Ulitchev tied a mine to his back and crawled to meet the enemy. An explosion sounded. The Komsomol hero perished, but the fascist tank was also blown up.

...Twilight was coming on. From the same place in the forest where the fascist tanks began their attack on the handful of Ulitchev's brave men there resounded a mighty "Hurrah," accompanied by the even, growing chatter of automatic weapons fire. A strong explosion shook the air. Col Kuryshev and Commissar N. Kh. Shcherbina headed for the spot of the explosion. They saw half demolished dugout shelters heaped with dirt and snow and covered with blood. Bizyayev rose with difficulty to meet them, wanting to report that the airborne Komsomol men had held back the enemy and had not given up the position. They had fought as befitting Russian heroes. But when he opened his mouth, bloody teeth fell out onto the snow. Bizyayev wheezed hoarsely and fell on his back.

Near the position defended by the six heroes sprawled enemy bodies. Next to the dugouts stood two burned-out tanks, a little farther away stood three others which had been knocked out, and a formless mass of iron lay near the entrance to the town. Several paces away, blinding in the bright sunlight, lay the Order of the Red Star on a piece of khaki material. A bit farther away lay a gray booklet spotted with dark blood, on which was a silhouette of Lenin.

Commissar Shcherbina picked up the Komsomol membership card, opened it, and read: "Ulitchev, Viktor Spiridonovich, 1916 year of birth, city of Aktyubinsk, Russian..."

By 20 March the 4th Airborne Corps was defending on the line excluding Zhukovka and including Akulevo, Dubrovnya, Prechistoye, Kurakino, Novinskay Dacha, Vyazovets, and Preobrazhensk.

On 31 March the enemy delivered a heavy blow between the towns of Dubrovnya and Prechistoye at the point of junction of the 214th and 9th airborne brigades, and tried to envelop the right flank of the latter. The Hitlerites succeeded in capturing Dubrovnya, Prechistoye, and Kurakino. Corps units suffered considerable losses.

The enemy command counted on throwing the airborne troops back from the Vyaz'ma-Kirov rail line, and then surrounding them in the forests east of the

road and destroying them. As a result, favorable conditions would be created for the withdrawal of the enemy Yuhnov Grouping to the southwest. At this time it was under heavy blows from the advancing Forty-Third and Forty-Ninth armies of the Western Front.

However the stubborn resistance of the airborne troops disrupted the further advance of enemy troops.

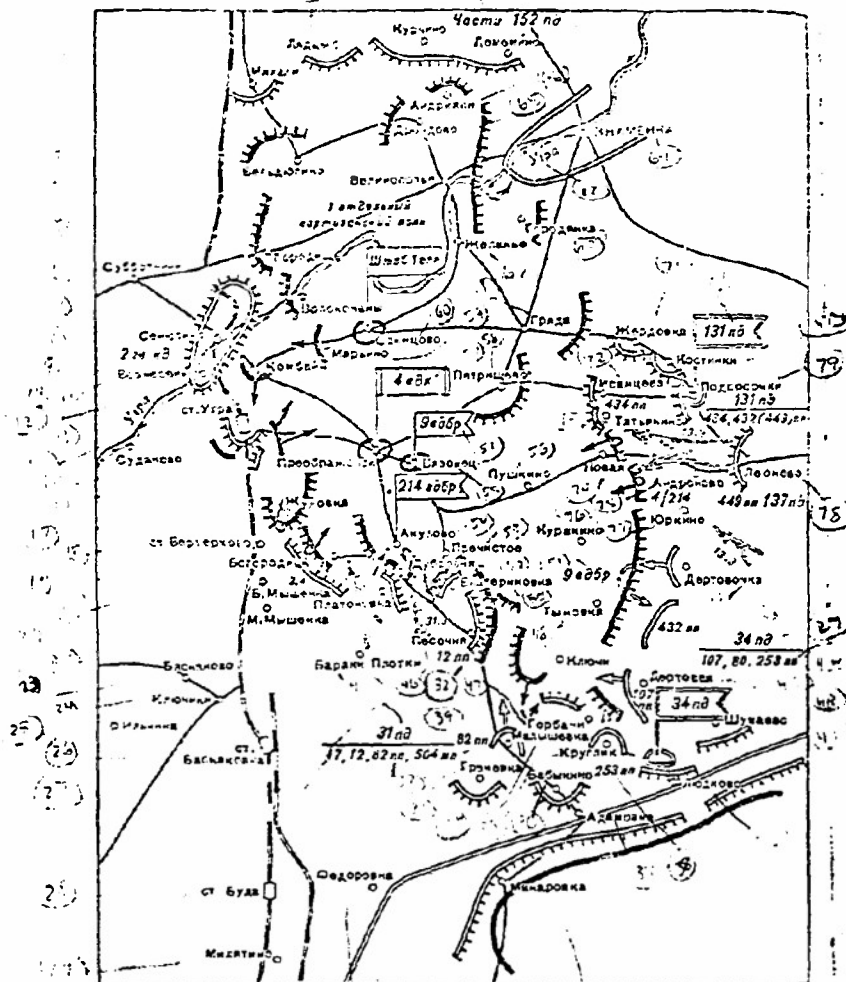
In its 27 March Directive, the Military Council of the Western Front demanded that Yefremov, Belov, and Kazankin immediately form small groups of bold, resourceful men, well equipped with automatic weapons. These detachments were given the mission of penetrating onto the enemy supply routes and raiding populated points containing enemy warehouses, supply convoys, communications centers, and other rear area service installations. The actions of the detachments were to be bold, quick, and decisive. Their personnel had to be able to handle weapons well and to operate in the enemy rear cut off from friendly units for several days.

In carrying out these instructions, the airborne troops displayed great activity even in defensive battles. Reconnaissance and diversionary groups and demolitions experts went into the enemy camp, continually spelling each other. The troops made wide use of ambushes and raids on enemy routes of movement, going deep into his rear. Excellent riflemen and snipers successfully destroyed enemy soldiers and officers on individual axes.

There were cases where the airborne troops even made use of damaged enemy equipment. In one of the battles not far from the forward edge of the battle area they killed an artillery crew and took the gun back to their area. An inspection showed that it lacked a firing mechanism.

In the next attack, the Hitlerites decided to recapture the gun, confident that it did not fire. It was a tense moment. The enemy had to be repulsed, but there was no firing mechanism. Then Pvt Lashin took the cleaning rod from his rifle, lopped it off with an axe, quickly placed a round in the gun, closed the breech block, inserted the cleaning rod piece into the breechblock hole in place of the striker, and, holding it with his left hand, told everyone to get away from the gun. Holding the axe in his right hand, he swung his arm, hit the rod firmly, and the round went off. Two or three more rounds were fired. Everything was in order. So the German gun served the airborne troops for a long while, since they had a sufficient amount of captured rounds.

The stubborn defensive battles of March on the whole ended successfully for the 4th Airborne Corps. Units of three enemy divisions were not able to break the stubbornness of the parachutists and were forced to be satisfied with only small successes on separate sectors. This month of fighting cost the enemy dearly. He suffered heavy losses and did not accomplish the mission of destroying the airborne force, which continued to exist. However the airborne force, too, was in a more difficult situation with each day of combat.



Situation of units of 4th Airborne Corps as of 18 March 1942

KEY: 1. Mikhal'; 2. Bel'dyugino; 3. Velikopol'ye; 4. 1st Separate Partisan Regiment; 5. HQ of 1st Sep Partisan Regt; 6. Subbotniki; 7. Gorodische; 8. Volokochany; 9. Sekyutino; 10. 2nd Guards Cavalry Division; 11. Voznesen'ye; 12. Ugra River; 13. Kombayn; 14. Ugra Station; 15. Sudakovo; 16. Preobrazhensk; 17. Zhukovka; 18. Verterkhovo Station; 19. Bogoroditskoye; 20. Bol'shaya Myshenka; 21. Platonovka; 22. Malaya Myshenka; 23. Baskakovo; 24. Klyuchiki; 25. Il'inka; 26. Baskakovka Station; 27. pd /pekhotnaya diviziya; infantry division/; 28. Buda Station; 29. Milyatino; 30. Fedorovka; 31. Makarovka; 32. pp /pekhotnyy polk; infantry regiment/; 33. Grachevka; 34. Malyshevka; 35. Kruglik; 36. Babykino; [continued on next page]

37. Adamovka; 38. infantry regiment; 39. mp mekhanizirovanny polk; mechanized regiment; 40. Lyudkovo; 41. Shumayevo; 42. infantry division; 43. Dertovaya; 44. Klyuchi; 45. Baraki Plotki; 46. Pesochnya; 47. Gorbachi; 48. Tynovka; 49. Dertovochka; 50. Yekaterinovka; 51. airborne brigade; 52. Dubrovnya; 53. Prechistoye; 54. Akulovo; 55. Vy. zovets; 56. Pushkino; 57. airborne corps; 58. Petrishchevo; 59. Mar'ino; 60. Svintsovo; 61. Gryada; 62. Zhelan'ye; 63. Gorod'yanka; 64. Znamenka; 65. Drozdovo; 66. Andriyaki; 67. Lyadtsy; 68. Kurchino; 69. Units of 152nd Inf Div; 70. Demenino; 71. Zherdovka; 72. Ivantseva; 73. Tat'yanino; 74. Novaya; 75. Andronovo; 76. Kuryakino; 77. Yurkino; 78. Leonovo; 79. Podsozonski; 80. Kostinki.

By the end of March the Corps hospitals held over 2,000 sick and wounded for treatment, of which as many as 600 were in need of immediate evacuation. Almost all the troops' antitank artillery had been destroyed in the fighting, and there was a sharp lack of ammunition and rations.

In his book Za nami Moskva (Moscow is Behind Us), Gen P. A. Belov, former Commander of the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, with which the airborne troops operated, gives them the following appraisal:

"After beginning the attack on 25 February, the airborne troops gained notable successes. In three days they fought for and captured the populated points of Klyuchi, Dertovochka, Tat'yanino, and Zherdovka. After some time several reconnaissance groups of the 9th Airborne Brigade even succeeded in making it across the Warsaw Highway to contact units of Fiftieth Army. Thus the parachutists almost accomplished that which was required of them. But Fiftieth Army was not able to break through the front and link up with the airborne troops.

Having beaten off the attack by this Army, the Germans decided to settle a score with the airborne troops, and threw units of three infantry divisions against them. The parachutists were in a tough situation."¹

On 2 April units of 131st Infantry Division continued to attack from the direction of Novaya, striking the main blow against Novinskaya Dacha and from the vicinity of Dubrovnya against Akulovo. At the price of considerable losses, the enemy again succeeded in somewhat pressing Corps units. But in spite of this the Corps continued to firmly hold the basic region, intercepting the main routes of withdrawal of the enemy Yuhnov Grouping. At the same time the Corps occupied considerable enemy forces with its actions. This without doubt facilitated the troops' advance from the front. In this situation the Corps command made the decision to defend as long as possible.

On the morning of 3 April the enemy continued to firmly attack Akulovo. The airborne troops waged an uneven battle, displaying examples of courage and heroism. However the battle against enemy tanks became more and more difficult due to an insufficient number of antitank weapons.

¹P. A. Belov, Za nami Moskva, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1963, p. 228.

The Corps right flank was defended most weakly, in spite of the fact that on this day the 8th Airborne Brigade returned to the Corps from the zone of combat operations of Belov's group. True, this brigade was now no larger than a reinforced battalion. It took up the defense in the vicinity of Preobrazhensk and Zhukovka, thus covering the Corps right flank to the rail line.

Units of the 2nd Cavalry Division of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps were operating south of the 4th Airborne Corps in the vicinity of Baskakovo and further west from the first days of April. They also had difficulty in repulsing the ever increasing blows of the enemy from the direction of Buda Station. The main body of the Corps was situated at this time in regions to the west and northwest of Ugra Station.

Col A. F. Kazankin considered the most dangerous situation to be on his right flank, where he adjoined the 2nd Cavalry Division in the vicinity of Verterkhovo Station.

The Hitlerites were constantly conducting reconnaissance of the entire region from the air. This included all that occupied by the airborne troops and horse cavalry, especially in the vicinity of Verterkhovo and Ugra stations and Voznesen'ye. At the same time they struck with bomber aviation and with their aggressive actions pinned the 4th Airborne Corps from the east and south-east.

All this indicated that the enemy was preparing to again strike a heavy blow, which was already designated as falling along the railroad line, where the Corps joined its neighbor to the right. By 16 April the enemy took Baskakovo and Bol'shaya Myshenka with heavy losses.

On 9 April the enemy, supported by aviation, armored trains, and tanks, threw back units of 2nd Guards Cavalry Division and a partisan detachment and seized Verterkhovo Station and the town of Zhukovka. By the end of 10 April he had succeeded in taking Ugra Station and lifting the blockade of the surrounded garrison in Voznesen'ye. During the latter half of the next day the enemy captured the settlement of Kombayn and continued to develop the attack toward Mar'ino.

The threat arose of a link-up of the southern and northeastern enemy groupings operating against the 4th Airborne Corps. It was necessary to unite the operations of all units on this axis. To this end the 4th Airborne Corps was operationally subordinated to the Commander of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, to whom the Commander of the Western Front assigned the mission of eliminating the enemy grouping which had penetrated by means of the united efforts of all units and, attacking in the direction of Milyatino, of linking up with Fiftieth Army, which was advancing from the south in the direction of this point.

The uniting of efforts of all units immediately brought success. The 4th Airborne Corps regrouped its units and by the end of 11 April had halted the enemy advance. On the morning of 12 April Kombayn and Ugra Station were

liberated. So as to avoid being surrounded and destroyed in the narrow wedge, the enemy was forced to hurriedly withdraw in a southerly direction, abandoning the station of Verterkhovo.

Gen Belov characterizes this period as follows: "For 10 days, from the 2nd through the 12th of April, the fighting continued, reaching extremes of bitterness. The Germans attempted to cut off the parachutists from us and destroy them no matter what..."¹ But they were not able to destroy them.

Thus the joint efforts of 4th Airborne Corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps eliminated the enemy breakthrough along the railroad and disrupted the attempt to split up the defensive zone of Soviet troops into pieces and subsequently destroy them. In the end the enemy was thrown back to his initial position.

In summing up results of combat operations by 4th Airborne Corps for March and the first half of April 1942 it must be stated that these were a component part of an operation by the Kalinin and Western fronts, having the goal of destroying the enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping. The goal was not achieved. The enemy was firmly dug in along the positions he occupied, checked the pressure of our advancing troops, and prevented them from linking up with the troops operating in his rear to the northwest and southwest of Vyaz'ma.

Operating jointly with the Thirty-Third Army, 1st Guards and 11th Cavalry corps in the rear of the Vyaz'ma Grouping, the 4th Airborne Corps inflicted heavy losses in men and materiel. The defensive battles of Corps units in this period were characterized by great stubbornness and aggressiveness on the part of the airborne troops. Defending on an extremely extended front with extremely limited forces and supplies, the airborne troops held a large region by means of broad maneuver, pinning down and attracting to themselves considerable enemy forces.

One More Attempt

When defensive battles were going on on 31 March, the command of the Western Front gave the 4th Airborne Corps the mission of reconnoitering enemy forces in the direction of Milyatino. A new offensive operation was being readied. Fiftieth Army was to try for the third time to break through across the Warsaw Highway. The 4th Airborne Corps, jointly with 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, was to help by hitting the Hitlerites from the rear.

The distance from the airborne troops and horse cavalry to Fiftieth Army was not great, but this strip of terrain was occupied by major enemy forces and was well prepared to repulse attacks from the front and rear.

On 12 April, after restoring the situation and regrouping, Corps units began preparing for the attack on Milyatino.

¹P. A. Belov, Za nami Moskva, p. 228.



Clarifying the combat mission

The attack began on the night of 13/14 April. By the end of 14 April units of the Corps had taken Verterkhovo Station, Terekhovka, Bol'shaya Myshenka, and Bogoroditskoye, and on the night of 14/15 April they took the towns of Platonovka, Baraki, and Plotki. The 214th Airborne Brigade liberated Akulovo, but met heavy enemy artillery and machine gun fire from Dubrovka and took up a defense along the line Platonovka, Akulovo, thus covering the advance of the Corps from the east. Units of 2nd Guards Cavalry Division fought a stubborn battle 3 kilometers from Baskakovka Station, trying to take this station and link up with the airborne troops.

During 15 and 16 April the 8th and 9th brigades continued the attack. By the end of 17 April they liberated Buda by a surprise attack, destroyed the enemy garrison, and seized big trophies: weapons, ammunition, rations, and up to 200 horses.

On the morning of 18 April, after heavy air and artillery strikes, the enemy counterattacked against Buda. The battle lasted almost the entire day, and only by 1600 hours did the enemy succeed in throwing out the airborne troops and taking this populated point, at the cost of heavy losses. The attempts of the airborne troops to again seize Buda were unsuccessful. There was also no success in the offensive operations of units on the other axis as well. The region of Novoye Askerovo and Kalugovo was heavily fortified by the enemy and represented a major center of resistance with a large number of weapons and engineer obstacles. The Corps was in no condition to overcome the latter with its own forces.

A battalion of parachutists was landed in the area of the 214th Airborne Brigade on the night of 15/16 April to reinforce the Corps. It was

subordinated to the Commander of 8th Airborne Brigade. After receiving reinforcements and ammunition, the Corps crossed difficult swamps and tried again to attack Novoye Askerovo. On 24 April subunits of 8th and 9th airborne brigades tried to attack this populated point three times, but the enemy's fire resistance grew stronger and stronger, and they were forced to withdraw to their initial position after suffering losses.

In this area Corps units met not only with a well equipped and strongly fortified defensive zone, but also with fresh enemy reserve units -- the 31st and 131st infantry and 19th Panzer divisions, which had been moved into the narrow terrain strip separating troops of Fiftieth Army and 4th Airborne Corps to prevent their link-up at any cost and to ensure themselves freedom of movement along the Warsaw Highway. In spite of the fact that no more than 2 kilometers remained to Novoye Askerovo and Askerovo Station for the front troops advancing toward each other, nevertheless, this distance was impassable both for units of Fiftieth Army and the more so for the lightly armed units of 4th Airborne Corps.

It became clear that without artillery and tanks Corps units were in no condition to break through the prepared enemy defense and link up with the advancing troops of Fiftieth Army. The Corps accomplished the mission which it was capable of with its available men and materiel: it destroyed a large number of enemy centers of resistance and moved from the rear for 1.5 kilometers toward the forward edge of the enemy line of resistance.

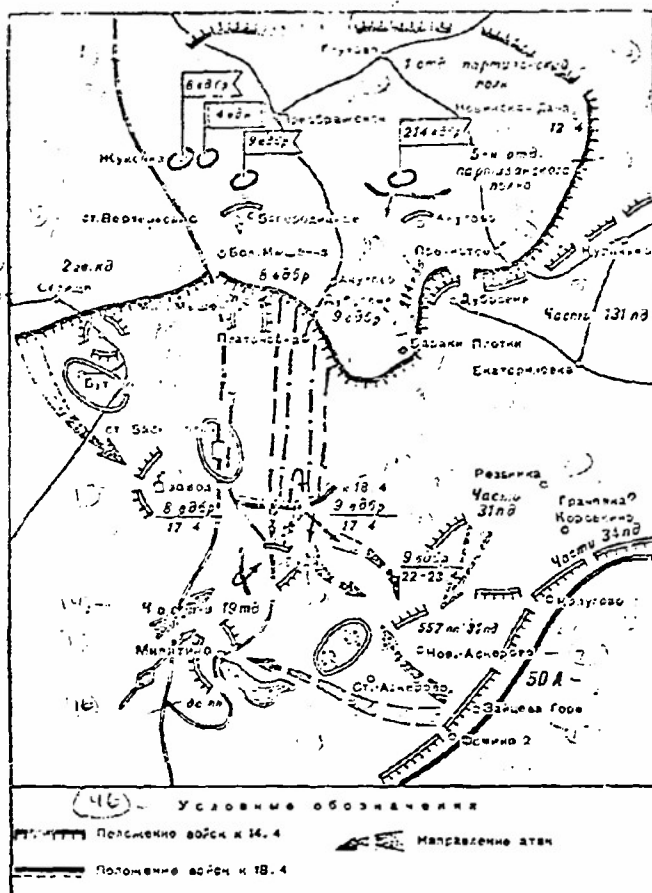
Attempts by Fiftieth Army to break through across the Warsaw Highway were again unsuccessful. During these days the Hitlerites were completing the destruction of the surrounded grouping of Thirty-Third Army. The Commander of 4th Airborne Corps understood that he could expect an increase in enemy activity in the near future, the more so as his reconnaissance reported a large build-up of enemy troops near the village of Vskhody.

The oncoming thaw followed by high water placed Corps units in a difficult situation. They were forced to fight on comparatively open terrain in front of heavily fortified enemy positions. The airborne troops frequently fought in thawed swamps, up to their waists in water, and with low supplies of ammunition and rations. The spring floods precluded any kind of transport, so rations and ammunition were delivered by hand. The Corps supply bases remained far behind.

By command decision, Corps units were withdrawn to the region which they previously occupied until 12 April, and as of 26 April they took up the defense there. The enemy learned of the withdrawal and moved after the Corps units in a northerly direction, occupying Malaya Myshenka and Dubrovnya and beginning to fortify these points.

Combat in Encirclement and Link-Up With Belov's Group

The Corps was covered from the north and northeast by the 1st Partisan Regiment, made up of several partisan detachments. The general front of Corps



Advance of 4th Airborne Corps on Milyatino (April 1942)

KEY: 1. airborne brigade; 2. airborne corps; 3. Zhukovka; 4. Bogoroditskoye; 5. Verterkhovo Station; 6. Bol'shaya Myshenka; 7. Guards cavalry; 8. Selishche; 9. Malaya Myshenka; 10. Platonovka; 11. Butovo; 12. Baskakovka Station; 13. plant; 14. Units of 19th Panzer Division; 15. Milyatino; 16. up to an infantry regiment; 17. Askerovo Station; 18. Fomino; 19. Zaytseva Gera; 20. Army; 21. Novoye Askerovo; 22. 557th Infantry Regt of 31st Inf Div; 23. Kalugovo; 24. Units of 34th Inf Div; 25. Korovkino; 26. Grachevka; 27. Fezvinka; 28. Units of 31st Inf Div; 29. as of 18 April; 30. Buda; 31. Baraki Plotki; 32. Yekaterinovka; 33. Units of 131st Inf Div; 34. Kurakino; 35. Dubrovnya; 36. Prechistoye; 37. Akulovo; 38. battalion of Separate Partisan Regt; 39. Novinskaya Dacha; 40. 1st Separate Partisan Regt; 41. Glukhovo; 42. Preobrazhensk; 43. Akulovo; 44. 214th Abn Brig; 45. Dubrovnya; 46. Conventional signs: Situation of troops as of 14 and 18 April; Direction of attack.

defenses was around 35 kilometers long. Units improved their defensive positions, replenished their reserves of ammunition and rations, evacuated the sick and seriously wounded to the homeland, and continuously conducted reconnaissance and broad diversionary actions.

By this time the Corps had 2,300 men, 1,700 from partisan detachments, and around 2,000 sick and wounded. Corps units had seven antitank guns, 37 antitank rifles, and 34 battalion mortars.

The enemy continued to reinforce his garrisons which encompassed the Corps area, and at the same time concentrated new units to the northeast opposite the partisans' defensive sector and to the south in the vicinity of Milyatino. The situation of these groupings showed that the enemy was preparing to hit simultaneously from two directions and settle once and for all with the grouping of Soviet troops in his rear by destroying the 4th Airborne Corps and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

The 1st Partisan Regiment was the weakest, especially in weapons. Therefore the Corps Commander decided to reinforce it with a composite detachment formed from personnel of Thirty-Third Army, which had moved out of encirclement the day before.

The airborne troops knew that the enemy command was preparing a major offensive operation under the code name "Hannover" to clear our forces from his rear. They knew that the operation would be conducted in the very near future. It was established from interrogations of captured diversionists on the eve of the attack that the operation would begin on 24 May, and that two Army corps -- seven divisions, and several hundred tanks, would take part. The main thrust, as was assumed, would be against Vskhody. There would be a simultaneous attack begun from the vicinity of Vyaz'ma and from other axes.

Even on the eve of the attack the Hitlerite command tried to conduct a diversionary operation to destroy the command and staffs of 4th Airborne Corps. Here is what Col A. A. Samsonov, an eyewitness of the unsuccessful Hitlerite diversion, tells about it. He was then working as a staff officer of 8th Airborne Brigade.

Early in the morning patrols brought a Master Sergeant to the Brigade Headquarters. They had picked him up when he emerged from the forest. Soon this man stood before Col A. A. Onufriyev and Sr Battalion Commissar I. V. Raspopov. In an agitated tone the MSgt told how, at daybreak, a diversionary detachment commanded by a Colonel had crossed the forward edge of the battle area and had headed for Vyazovets, site of the 4th Airborne Corps Headquarters.

As soon as he learned of the intentions of the diversionary group, the Brigade Commander took urgent steps. Staffs and troops were immediately informed. Two reserve companies were immediately sent to destroy the group.

The diversionists were caught not far from the location of the 4th Airborne Division Headquarters. The fight was brief. The companies attacked the

moving detachment by surprise along a forest road and fired on the traitors point-blank with machine guns and automatic weapons. Only a small group managed to escape.

On the morning of 24 May the enemy moved into the attack from the vicinity of Veshki and Mikhali after a heavy artillery preparation and with the support of a considerable number of dive bombers, against the partisans in the general direction of Ugra Station, and from the direction of Milyatino against 2nd Guards Cavalry Division along the railroad in the very same direction and in the direction of Vskhody. Successful enemy operations on these axes made it possible for him to fully surround the airborne troops and units of 2nd Guards Cavalry Division in the region they were occupying.

According to the estimate of the Corps Commander, no less than one infantry division was attacking just from the northeast against the partisans. Units of 31st Infantry Division were operating directly against Corps units from the south. At the same time, units of 331st Infantry Division were attacking against 2nd Guards Cavalry Division on the Il'inka, Vskhody sector. All these divisions had tanks and were supported by artillery and aviation.

Units of 131st Infantry Division, which had been reinforced after losses suffered in March, began more aggressive actions in front of the 214th Airborne Brigade sector.

A critical situation had arisen as a result of the first day of the attack -- the Corps was threatened with encirclement and destruction by superior enemy forces. It became impossible and purposeless to hold back an attack by such forces. The decision suggested itself -- to withdraw the remaining personnel from encirclement into new regions where they could be utilized for further combat under more favorable conditions. Therefore, with the permission of the front commander, Col Kazankin made the decision to withdraw to the west into the area held by 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

The following fact is an example of the difficult combat situation and the persistence of the airborne troops. On 25 May the Hitlerites encircled one company of the 8th Airborne Brigade, which was defending the village of Bol'shaya Myshenka. The Hitlerites proposed to the airborne troops that they surrender. The parachutists answered with accurate fire. They fought to the last man. Almost the entire company perished, but the enemy did not pass, and suffered heavy losses. Many dead Hitlerites and burned out tanks were left on the battlefield. However the enemy committed new units to battle and continued to move forward, although the tempo of this advance gradually lessened.

Conducting defensive battles, units of the Corps and the partisans left small screening forces and covering groups on the positions held and on the night of 24/25 May began to withdraw in the direction of Selibka, where they planned to cross the Ugra River.

On the morning of 26 May, by the time the airborne troops approached the river, the enemy had enveloped the left flank of the partisan regiment.

Developing the attack from the south, the enemy completed encirclement of the Corps, which came up to the water obstacle without crossing equipment. At this time of year the Ugra River was quite a serious barrier: it was up to 100-120 meters wide and had a strong current and a swampy, open west bank. Approaches to the river from the east were concealed, as the forest came right up to the water.

During the day Corps units prepared for the crossing with the help of material on hand in the sector including Pishchevo and the mouth of the Gordota River (a tributary of the Ugra). After forcing the river, the Corps was to break the ring of encirclement and develop the success in the direction of Fursovo.

First to cross were reconnaissance subunits and advance detachments, which were to seize a base of operations and support the crossing of the Corps first echelon -- the 8th Airborne Brigade. The mission of the first echelon was to expand the base of operations and hold it for a day to support the crossing of Corps units using equipment on hand.

The crossing began on the night of 25/26 May and ended only with the onset of darkness on 27 May. After the crossing, Corps units concentrated in the forest south of the Gordota River and the populated points of Selibka and Chashchi, which were firmly held by the enemy. This was accomplished under the constant pressure of enemy aviation and at the cost of heavy losses.

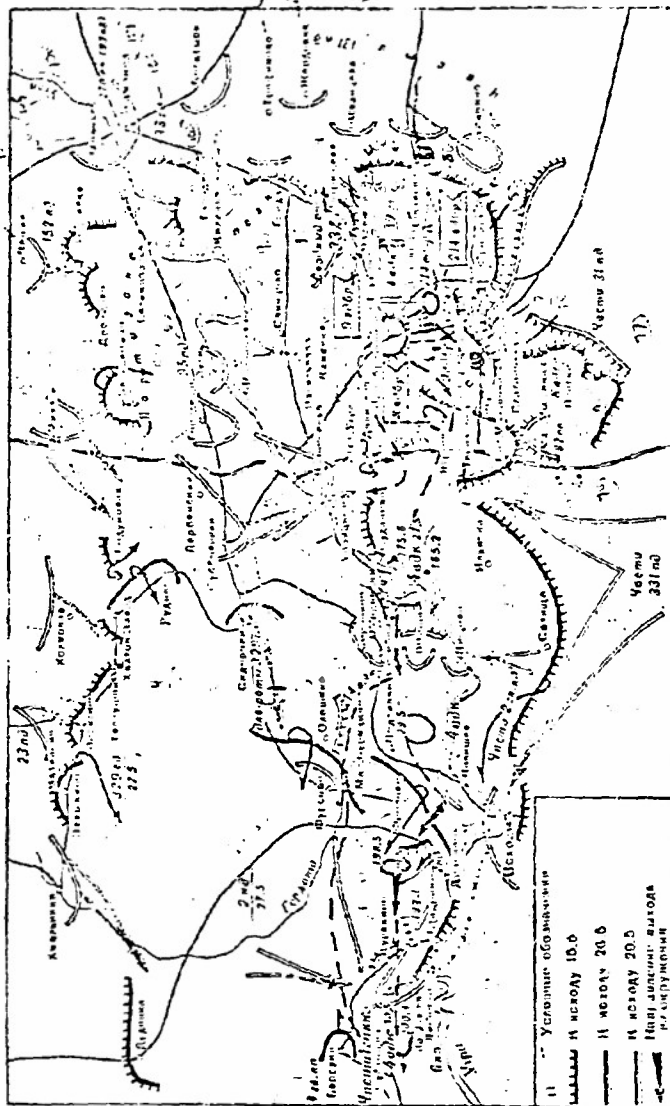
In view of the utter impossibility to break through in the direction of Fursovo, the Corps Commander decided on the night of 27/28 May to break out of the encirclement between Selibka and Chashchi, and later to concentrate in the forest south of Podlipki. However the 214th Airborne Brigade, which was covering the breakthrough of the Corps main body, was cut off and was forced to break through with heavy fighting in another direction, forcing one more river -- the Gordota. This Brigade succeeded with great difficulty on the night of 28/29 May in breaking out of encirclement in the direction of Fursovo and later in linking up with the Corps.

With the onset of darkness on the night of 28/29 May, the Corps threw back small units, continued its advance to the west, and toward daybreak moved into the forest northwest of Shadrino. In this area the extremely exhausted personnel were given a rest. They felt a deficiency in rations and were almost out of ammunition.

While Corps units moved from the region they occupied to the west, the enemy forced units of 2nd Guards Cavalry Division to withdraw and crossed the Ugra River, following which he began to spread out in a northwesterly direction. Therefore, when the Corps moved into the forest northwest of Shadrino, it again encountered the enemy moving in here. Two enemy infantry regiments blocked the Corps route to the west on the line Shadrino, Kurakino.

Corps units again were forced to break out of encirclement. As a result of a night attack in a narrow sector, the airborne troops succeeded

NOT REPRODUCIBLE



Combat in encirclement and movement out of encirclement of 4th Airborne Corps with 10th Army troops

KEY: 1. Dudenka; 2. 2nd Cav Div; 3. Gorota River; 4. Fursov; 5. 4th Gds Cav Regt; 6. Barsuki; 7. units of 1st Gds Cav Corps; 8. Pustoshka; 9. 4th Abn Corps; 10. up to two inf regts; 11. 6th Cav Regt; 12. Ugra River; 13. Lyubogoshcha; 14. Shchadrino; 15. Drakino; 16. Kurakino; 17. 2nd Cav Div; 18. Prolovo; 19. Maloye Burmakino; 20. Vskhody; 21. Selishche; 22. units of 331st Inf Div; 23. 2nd Cav Div; 24. Il'inka; 25. Pishchevo; 26. 4th Abn Corps; 27. Velishka; 28. Podlipki; 29. 214th Abn Brig; 30. Oleshino; 31. two companies of 329th Rifle Div; 32. Sidorovich; 33. Rudnovo; 34. Khvatov Zavod; 35. Teplushki; 36. 329th Rifle Div; 37. Zevytkino; 38. Khmel'niki; 39. Matyushino; 40. 23rd Inf Div; 41. Verigino; 42. Kholmovaya; 43. Godunovka; 44. Derbyanskiy; 45. Subbotniki; 46. Sorokino; 47. Medvedki; 48. Selibka; 49. Cheshchi; [continued on next page]

50. 4th Abn Corps; 51. Sudakovo; 52. Troitskoye; 53. Voznesen'ye; 54. Gorodishche; 55. partisan regt; 56. Mikhali; 57. Bel'dyugino; 58. Drozdovo; 59. Velikopol'ye; 60. 95th Inf Div; 61. Lugi; 62. Volokochany; 63. Svintsovo; 64. Vasil'yavka; 65. Kamenka; 66. Ugra Station; 67. Deniskovo; 68. Preobrazhensk; 69. 8th Abn Brig; 70. Zhukovka; 71. Terekhovka; 72. Bol'shaya Myshenka; 73. Malaya Myshenka; 74. 82nd Inf Regt; 75. 8th Abn Brig; 76. Plotki; 77. units of 31st Inf Div; 78. Platonovka; 79. Dubrovnya; 80. Zhukovka; 81. 9th Abn Brig; 82. Bogoroditskoye; 83. Prehistoye; 84. Akulovo; 85. Kurakino; 86. 214th Abn Brig; 87. units of 131st Inf Div; 88. Novinskaya Dacha; 89. 214th Abn Brig; 90. Vizovets; 91. 4th Abn Corps; 92. Glukhovo; 93. Nadezhda; 94. 9th Abn Brig; 95. Petrishcheva; 96. 33rd Army; 97. composite detachment; 98. Gryada; 99. Zhelan'ye; 100. Gorodyanka; 101. Veshki; 102. 152nd Inf Div; 103. Andriyaki; 104. Zarech'ye; 105. Ugra River; 106. 270th Inf Regt (93rd Inf Div); 107. Znamenka; 108. 93rd Inf Div; 109. Bogatyri; 110. Trofimovo; 111. Zherdovka; 112. Ivantseva.

again in breaking out of the circle and by the morning of 30 May in massing in the vicinity of Pustoshki, in the area of units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

The Corps brought itself in order during the period from 31 May through 3 June, after fierce and exhausting battles.

Thus the decision to move troops of 4th Airborne Corps out from under the blow of a heavy enemy grouping was made opportunely and was accomplished successfully, in spite of an extremely difficult situation and great hardships which Corps personnel had to overcome.

The command of the united group of forces (1st Guards Cavalry and 4th Airborne corps) firmly believed that a large offensive operation by troops of the Western Front would begin in the first days of June, in any case no later than the 5th. The time was very suitable for this. The main bodies of two Army corps had turned their front to the west and northwest in attacking the airborne troops and horse cavalry. The planned thrust by Gen Boldin's Fiftieth Army should have been against the flank and rears of these corps, and units of 1st Guards Cavalry and 4th Airborne corps should have gone into the attack.

The enemy could hardly have withstood the simultaneous blow against front and rear, and two of his Army corps could have been smashed. Troops of the Western Front would have entered into liberated territory and possibly could have accomplished the mission which they had tried to carry out all winter: liberate Vyaz'ma and surround the two Hitlerite armies (Fourth and Ninth) east of that town.

But this time, too, there was no offensive. The unfavorable situation for us on other sectors of the Soviet-German Front forced its cancellation.

Breakthrough Onto Home Territory

After units of 4th Airborne Corps were withdrawn into the area held by troops of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps, the Hitlerite command continued to bring up more and more forces, trying no matter what to clear its rear area of Soviet troops and partisans. In the beginning of summer the Hitlerites had the opportunity to employ tanks and planes on a broader scale.

Continuous enemy attacks were exhausting our units. Both sides were suffering heavy losses, but the enemy had the opportunity to quickly replace them, while our troops were limited in this regard. True, by order of the Commander of the Western Front, Belov's horse cavalry was reinforced in the period from 29 May through 5 June 1942 by landing over 4,000 men, 131 anti-tank rifles, 48 battalion mortars, and 184 light machine guns from the 23rd and 211th airborne brigades. However every day with each battle the number of personnel of units operating in the enemy rear was reduced, while more and more units kept coming for the enemy.

In the beginning of June it became clear that it was becoming difficult for the reduced units of 1st Guards Cavalry and 4th Airborne corps to hold the areas occupied in the enemy rear any longer. In addition, the situation at the front had changed abruptly. The Western Front had gone on the defense, and the need for our units to remain in the enemy rear for joint actions with front forces had vanished.

The commands of both corps reported to the Front Headquarters the situation and the plan for withdrawal of troops out of encirclement, and asked that it be approved. The plan provided for a breakthrough out of encirclement to be begun from the area east of Yel'nya, then a movement into the forests northwest of Kirov, penetration here of the enemy defenses by a blow from the rear, and link-up with front troops.

The Commander of Western Front made the decision to withdraw all units operating in the enemy rear onto territory occupied by friendly forces, and approved the proposed plan. During the move out of encirclement it was recommended that partisans and their bases be used, since by this time the question of food, evacuation of wounded, etc., had become very acute. With the aim of uniting the efforts and organizing a centralized control of the move, all units operating in the enemy rear were placed into one group, command of which was given to the Commander and staff of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps.

According to information available to the Group Commander, the Partisan Detachment imeni Lazo operated in the forests south of Yel'nya, and the partisan detachment commanded by Capt Galyuga was operating in the forests west of Kirov.

The overall length of the planned route of movement was 160-200 kilometers. It lay across territory occupied by the enemy and across regions held by partisans.

The airborne troops and horse cavalry began to move out of occupied areas on 6 June, repulsing continuous attacks by infantry and tanks supported by enemy air strikes. By 14 June they had moved up to the Warsaw Highway.

With the onset of darkness on 14 June, the airborne troops moved farther south, with the mission of breaking through the enemy defenses in the Denisovka, Pokrovskoye sector and massing in the vicinity of the forest to the east of 1-oze Buykovo.

It was established by reconnaissance that the sector of the Corps breakthrough was defended by up to an infantry regiment with tanks, which continuously patrolled the Highway, and that almost every populated point south of the Highway was occupied by enemy units. They couldn't count on surprise in their penetration. Consequently they either had to deliver a heavy blow in a narrow sector or seek out weak places in the enemy defenses. These defenses were on terrain which commanded the initial area for the attack, occupied by the airborne troops.

It was difficult to make enveloping movements under these conditions, and it was hardly advisable, since the personnel were exhausted. The main thing was that it was difficult to disengage from enemy reconnaissance. Under such unfavorable circumstances the airborne troops were helped out only by the nighttime.

The breakthrough of the 4th Airborne Corps began at different times, since its separate units were prematurely detected in moving from the initial position for the attack and the enemy immediately opened up on them. In spite of this, the Corps main body broke through the enemy defenses on the Highway by midday on 14 June. Overcoming the stubborn enemy resistance in the strong points of Amsherovo and Chetnoye, the main body massed in the forest to the east of 1-oze Buykovo.

The enemy suffered considerable losses in the battle for the Warsaw Highway. Regimental colors were captured and the 398th Infantry Regiment and several other enemy garrisons were smashed. The 8th Airborne Brigade and certain units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps did not succeed in penetrating the enemy defenses on this day. They were forced to withdraw to their initial position in front of the Warsaw Highway.

On the morning of 16 June the enemy began to hurriedly move motorized infantry and tanks toward the sector where the airborne troops had broken through. Enemy aviation delivered almost continuous strikes against our troops.

The 4th Airborne Corps suffered considerable losses in heavy fighting from 24 May through 15 June. By 16 June around 1,500 wounded had accumulated in Corps units, which extremely limited their mobility and prevented them from conducting decisive offensive operations. In addition, the airborne troops had almost no ammunition and rations, and needed at least a short rest.

Since the entire grouping had not succeeded in breaking through and it essentially was two independent groupings separated by the enemy defenses, the decision was made that the Commander of 4th Airborne Corps should unite under his command all units which had broken across the Warsaw Highway and operate independently with the previous mission, i.e. with the goal of linking up with front troops.

After receiving authorization for independent operations and clarifying the situation of Galyuga's partisan detachment, which was located in the forests south of Betlitsa Station, Col Kazankin decided to move into this area on the night of 17/18 June. He then proposed to make use of the forest mass in the area west of Kirov and break through the enemy defenses in the weakest place.

On the night of 17/18 June, in pouring rain, the Corps made a 30 kilometer march and massed in the forest to the east of Podgerb, where it was possible to give the men rest, be replenished with ammunition and rations (by air), and then make the last dash to the front line to break through.

The Corps Commander requested that the Commander of Tenth Army on the night of 21/ 22 June support the Corps units in their blow from the rear against enemy defenses with artillery fire and troops operations from the front.

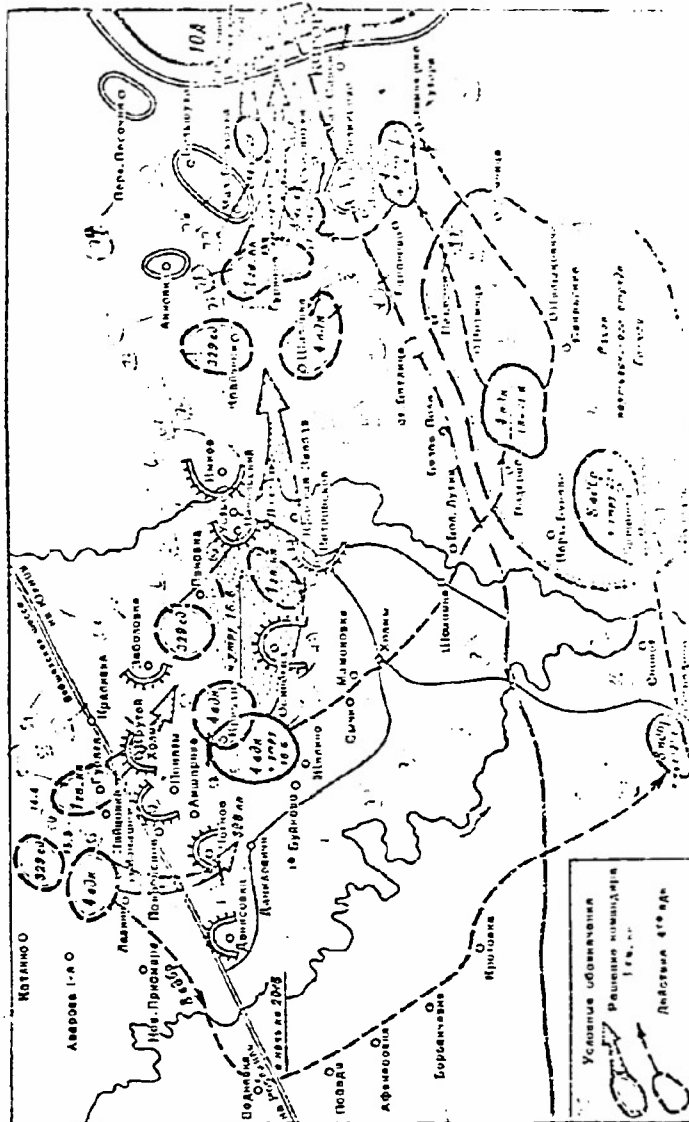
Two partisan battalions were sent into the area of Krutoy Kholm to help the 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and 8th Airborne Brigade in breaking through the defenses along the Warsaw Highway.

From 18 through 21 June the 4th Airborne Corps was in the area where the partisan detachment was situated. The men rested and brought themselves in order, and units were provided ammunition and rations. Almost all the sick and wounded were able to be evacuated by air to front hospitals. At the same time thorough preparations were being made for the last decisive breakthrough.

The airborne troops had to overcome an enemy defense which had been well prepared in an engineering sense. In addition, the movement to the initial position for the breakthrough was over open terrain in many sectors.

When it became known in the partisan detachment that the troops would break through to link up with friendly forces, a majority of the old men and women with children who had been hiding from the Hitlerite invaders in the partisan detachment began to request the Corps Commander to take them with him. Thus he had to be concerned for preserving the lives of Soviet citizens. They were placed in the center of the march formation, and later of the combat formation of the Corps units.

During the entire winter and spring of 1942 the enemy had been doing much work on defenses in the vicinity of the city of Kirov. Earth-and-timber pillboxes were placed in such a way that they provided mutual fire support.



Link-up of 4th Airborne Corps with troops of Tenth Army

KEY: 1. Kotlino; 2. Azarova 1-aya; 3. Lazino; 4. Novaya Prisma; 5. 8th Abn Brig; 6. Denisovka; 7. Vodnevka; 8. to Roslavl'; 9. on the night of 19/20 June; 10. Pobeda; 11. Afanasovka; 12. Borovichevka; 13. Krotovka; 14. 329th Rifle Div; 15. 4th Abn Corps; 16. Pokrovskoye; 17. Chotnoye; 18. 398th Inf Regt; 19. Danilovich; 20. 1-oye Buykovo; 21. Zhilino; 22. Sychi; 23. Mamonovka; 24. Kholm; 25. Shokhovka; 26. Bol'shaya Lutna; 27. Podgreb; 28. Verkhneye Bunevo; 29. 8th Abn Brig on morning of 22 June; 30. Bazhenov; 31. Snopot; 32. 8th Abn Brig by the end of 21 June; 33. Roznodino; 34. Kopal'; 35. Molehanovka; 36. area of Galyuga's partisan detachment; 37. Sinyavskiy; 38. Ivashkovichi; [continued on next page]

39. 4th Abn Corps; 40. Vetmitsa; 41. Zimnitsa; 42. Piderki; 43. Galonovc;
 44. Betlitsa Station; 45. Beloye Pole; 46. Petrovskoye; 47. Krasnaya Zvezda;
 48. 1st Gds Cav Corps; 49. Osikovka; 50. 4th Abn Corps on morning of 16 June;
 51. Krivaya; 52. 4th Abn Corps; 53. Amsharova; 54. Ponyaty; 55. Monashki;
 56. Zaytsevk; 57. 1st Gds Cav Corps; 58. Guryata; 59. Warsaw Highway;
 60. Krapivna; 61. Krutoy Kholm; 62. to Yukhnov; 63. Zabolovka; 64. 329th Rifle
 Div; 65. Panovka; 66. on morning of 16 June; 67. Ust'ye; 68. Yamnoye; 69. Ni-
 kol'skiy; 70. Lazinki; 71. Kraychiki; 72. 329th Rifle Div; 73. Annovka;
 74. Verkhnyaya Pesochnya; 75. Bol'shukha; 76. Malaya Bol'shukha; 77. as of
 1400 hours 23 June; 78. 1st Gds Cav Corps; 79. Gurikov; 80. Shilovka; 81. 4th
 Abn Corps; 82. 4th Abn Corps; 83. Zimnitskiye Khutora; 84. Pogrebki; 85. Fe-
 liksovo Station; 86. Malye Savki; 87. Kirov; 88. Kilinc; 89. 4th Abn Corps;
 90. on morning of 24 June; 91. Pesochnya; 92. Tenth Army; 93. Surovegin;
 94. 4th Abn Corps as of 1600 hours 23 June; 95. Conventional signs: Decision
 by Commander of 1st Gds Cav Corps; Operations by 4th Abn Corps.

Large log obstacles were put up in the forest along lanes and paths, and the edges of the forest were laced with barbed wire. In addition, all roads, paths and lanes were adapted by the enemy for the movement of tanks and APCs. Platforms were built in high trees for observers and machine guns with capability of all-around fire.

The Corps Commander conducted thorough reconnaissance in the direction of Zhilino, seizure of which would ensure the success of advancing troops, and carefully coordinated his actions and the activities of artillery, aviation, and troops advancing from the front by radio.

In order to draw the enemy away from the main axis of breakthrough, groups of submachine gunners were sent off to the sides from the zone of advance of Corps units. They had the mission of beginning a fight and attracting the enemy's attention to themselves, then under cover of darkness disengaging and taking up their position in the rear of the assault column as a rear covering force.

The combat formation of the attacking units was made up in accordance with the situation. At the head and on the flanks of the units was the greater portion of weapons, and in the center were the wounded and the women and children. Ahead of the entire combat formation moved a reinforced advance detachment, which by the end of 23 June was the first to engage the enemy. Soon the Corps main body also began the attack behind it.

The advance units burst into the trenches and strong points, destroying the Hitlerites with grenades and automatic weapons fire. In spite of the enemy's strong resistance, four hours after the beginning of the breakthrough the 4th Airborne Corps moved into the vicinity of Zhilino, where the Tenth Army's front of defense ran. Here they linked up with friendly troops.

In this battle the Corps lost around 120 killed and wounded. All seriously wounded were carried from the enemy rear. The old men, women, and children were led out, and the lightly wounded did not leave the combat formations until the end of the fighting.



Col A. F. Kazankin talks with scouts before going out on a mission

The five months of combat operations by the airborne forces in the enemy rear ended with the movement of the main body of the 4th Airborne Corps and some units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps into the vicinity of Zhilino.

The 8th Airborne Brigade and remaining units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps moved out later.

Units of 8th Airborne Brigade and 1st Guards Cavalry Corps concentrated in the forest to the north of Rognedino by the end of the day on 21 June, after breaking through the enemy defenses somewhat to the west of the main sector of breakthrough of the 4th Airborne Corps. By the morning of 22 June the Brigade moved into the forests north of Kopali. Under cover of the partisans in this region, all seriously wounded and sick personnel were evacuated from their airfield by air. All other personnel were placed into one detachment under the command of Maj M. Ya. Karnaukhov, former Commander of the advance airborne detachment, which was the first to be landed in the enemy rear.

He was given the mission of moving the remaining personnel to friendly territory in the defense sector of Tenth Army to the north of Kirov, i.e. along the same axis by which the Corps main body had broken through. The repeated operations to break through the defenses in the area north of Kirov were a surprise for the Hitlerites. They had no major reserves in the vicinity and were in no condition to hinder the breakthrough.

On the night of 27/28 June the detachment broke through the enemy defense with insignificant losses and moved into the area of disposition of troops of the Western Front.

* * *

Thus the airborne operation by the 4th Airborne Corps on the Western Front was ended. For five months the airborne troops waged intense battles

against regular enemy troops, interrupted their lines of communication, and together with Gen Belov's horse cavalry controlled considerable territory in the enemy rear. These operations activated the partisan movement in many regions between Vyaz'ma, Smolensk, Roslavl', and Yukhnov. However one must not forget the interrelationship of successful operations by the airborne landing forces with the course of development of offensive operations by troops at the front. In the winter of 1942 our troops were not successful in completely smashing any of the main groupings of fascist German troops. Operations conducted for this purpose on all main strategic axes, including the western axis, were not completed.

One of the reasons the troops did not accomplish their missions was that the GHQ overestimated the capabilities of the Soviet Armed Forces in the beginning of 1942 and assigned them missions of which they were not capable. This is pointed out in the Kratkaya istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny (A Concise History of the Great Patriotic War). In addition, the Hitlerite army was, as before, very strong and very large. The situation was seriously aggravated by the fact that the Army and Navy had no major mechanized or tank large units. This weakened the force of blows by the Red Army and reduced its tempo of advance.

A lack of the required amount of equipment, weapons, and ammunition also had a negative effect on the tempo of our advance.¹

It is without doubt that the situation which arose on the Soviet-German Front in the winter of 1942 could not help but essentially influence the combat employment of airborne troops in their primary role during this period.

In summing up results of the airborne operation, the question arises: was this operation operationally justified, and was a mistake made here?

The rout of fascist German troops before Moscow and the successful pursuit of retreating Hitlerites gave rise among certain commanders to an exaggerated impression of the capabilities of our troops and led to an underestimation of the enemy.

The decision of the Military Council of the Western Front evidently reflected that evaluation of the operational and strategic situation which was formed at that time in the GHQ of the Supreme Command. The successes of Soviet troops in December created in the GHQ an assurance that now they could achieve great victories without pausing before a new offensive.

The lack of a needed pause and a deficiency in man and materiel determined the limited success of the Rzhev-Vyaz'ma Operation of the Kalinin and Western fronts.

An essential drawback in this operation was common to both fronts. Breakthroughs of enemy defenses were made in narrow sectors. Troops went

¹See Velikaya Otechestvennaya vojna Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945. Kratkaya istoriya, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1965, p. 138.

forward, but took no steps to widen the gap. As a matter of fact, the attackers had not the forces for this purpose. Enemy tanks and infantry supported by aviation delivered counterblows and restored their defenses rather easily, and our troops which had penetrated were then isolated from the main body.

For example, in January Twenty-Ninth Army, which was attacking Rzhev, fell into encirclement. The shock grouping of Thirty-Third Army, commanded by the experienced and resolute commander Lt Gen M. G. Yefremov, turned out to be in a difficult situation. This group of forces included three rifle divisions which had been considerably weakened in previous fighting. Gen Belov's group also was in a serious spot: five light cavalry divisions broke across the Warsaw Highway, but a rifle division, a tank brigade, the artillery belonging to the cavalry divisions, and the service elements were cut off by the enemy from the main body and were not able to go through the gap.

Thus several centers of fighting by Soviet troops built up in the rear of the enemy Vyaz'ma Grouping at the end of January and the beginning of February 1942. These were the groups of forces of Gen Belov and Gen Yefremov and the group of airborne forces of Maj Soldatov and Lt Col Onufriyev. By the time the decision was made to employ the 4th Airborne Corps in February, the situation of the above groups could not even be considered satisfactory. Here the question arises: was it worth it under these circumstances to move the airborne troops to the south to meet troops of Fiftieth Army? Would it not have been better to have used the 4th Airborne Corps at first to reinforce Yefremov's group of forces, and then, after these forces were joined with those of Gen Belov, to have formed a unified base of operations; then, based on this, and under the unified command of the united group of forces, to have delivered a blow to the north between Vyaz'ma and Smolensk to meet the 11th Cavalry Corps of the Kalinin Front, or to the south to meet the Army of Gen Boldin? But the Western Front command did not give appropriate instructions.

Lack of coordination both of times and of axes of operations by Soviet troops near Vyaz'ma prevented them from achieving decisive successes, while the enemy had the opportunity to repulse their attacks piecemeal, first in one, then in another place, by maneuvering his men and materiel.

This operation was the first airborne landing operation in the history of military art in which such a large unit as an airborne corps was landed at night under difficult winter weather conditions. It undoubtedly has much instructional value even for the present.

The airborne troops fought in the enemy rear as faithful and wholly dedicated sons of the Soviet Motherland, true to the end to the Communist Party. Daring and boldness in attacks, stubbornness and courage in the defense, firmness in continuous battles against an enemy superior in number and weapons -- this is what distinguished the soldiers, sergeants, and officers in battle. Only the considerable superiority of the enemy in artillery, aviation, and tanks forced the airborne troops to withdraw to new positions. But even in these cases they employed various forms of maneuver to inflict palpable losses on the Hitlerites in men and equipment.

Judging by the numbering of enemy units which took part in the battle against the airborne landing force, over five divisions reinforced with tanks participated at various times and from various directions in trying to destroy them. Thus considerable enemy forces were pinned down to the landing force for a long time.

The airborne troops, horse cavalrymen, and partisans operating on the very important Vyaz'ma Axis in the winter of 1941/42 liberated an enormous territory, inflicted serious losses on the enemy, pinned down many large units of Group of Armies "Center,"¹ and limited its offensive capabilities. The enemy command conducted two major operations with the intention of finishing off our forces and eliminating a serious threat to the rear of Group of Armies "Center," as well as creating conditions for its offensive. These were Operation Seidlitz against units of 1st Guards Cavalry Corps and partisans operating with it, and Operation Hannover against units of 4th Airborne Corps and partisan detachments.

In summing up results of the combat operations of 4th Airborne Corps in the enemy rear, we must once again stress the relationship between success in the airborne landing force accomplishing its assigned mission and the organization of its drop into the enemy rear. We must remember that the landing of troops in a short time and in precise areas ensures not only surprise in the appearance of the forces in the enemy rear, but also success in accomplishing the assigned missions.

The distinguishing features of combat operations of personnel of the 4th Airborne Corps were exceptional persistence and stubbornness in achieving the assigned goals, daring, boldness, military cunning, and the employment of broad maneuver of men and materiel with the aim of achieving surprise.

In the course of fighting of a fierce nature the personnel accomplished numerous unparalleled exploits and displayed utter devotion to the Communist Party and their socialist Motherland. The situation, and together with it the combat missions of units of the airborne landing force, changed frequently, but purposeful organization of Party and political work was an invariable condition for successful accomplishment of a combat mission.

The ties maintained with the homeland had a great educational value. As soon as the opportunity presented itself, the command of the Western Front sent presents and letters by air for the soldiers, sergeants, and officers from workers, employees, and collective farm members, from near and dear.

A large group of courageous parachutists was decorated in April 1942 by Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet and by Order of the Commander of the Western Front. One hundred eighty Komsomol members alone were decorated in the 8th Airborne Brigade.

¹The 13th, 43rd, 49th, and 55th Army corps. See Voyenno-istoricheskiy zhurnal (Military Historical Journal), 1965, No. 3, p. 44.

Representatives of the Commander of Airborne Forces and of the Western Front, members of the VLKSM Central Committee, and correspondents of Komsomol'skaya pravda flew into the rear area to where the airborne troops were located. Their personal contact and talks with the soldiers about the situation on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War and especially about the heroic labor of the Soviet people inspired in the soldiers a sense of pride for their mighty socialist Motherland and complete assurance in the inevitable and close victory over the foe. The soldiers felt a living tie with the Motherland. They felt the concern of the Party and Government for them and bent all efforts to achieve victory.

In their letter to the Komsomol Central Committee, the Commander and Commissar of the Corps wrote: "We have not the words to characterize the heroism of this golden detachment of Soviet youth -- the Komsomol members. One feels pride and admiration when daily we see and recall their marvelous combat deeds. There has not been one instance where Komsomol members accomplished their mission poorly. There has not been one case where they trembled, seeing that the enemy was superior to them in numbers and weapons.



Awarding orders and medals in the enemy rear

The glorious army of airborne Komsomol members is a reliable support for our officers and is a worthy reserve of the Communist Party. Many of them, along with Party members, entered their names in the annals of immortal glory of our people."

The command of the Western Front had a high estimation of the combat operations of personnel of the 4th Airborne Corps, and in its May 1st message of greeting, dated 30 April, stated: "To Kazankin, Olenin, Kuryshchev, Shcherbin, Onufriyev, Raspopov, Lebedev.

Pass on to your miraculous heroes our May 1st greeting and the wish that they hit the foul Fritzes even more firmly and successfully. Show the Hitlerite bandits that in spring you can hit the enemy harder than in winter."

Chapter VI

ON THE RIGHT BANK OF THE DNIEPER

The Hitlerite command was forced to once and for all give up the intention of holding territory east of the Dnieper in the middle of September, under pressure of a successful offensive by Soviet troops on the southern wing of the Soviet-German Front. In order to save their armed forces operating in the Ukraine, the enemy decided to move them beyond the Dnieper. The enemy command hoped to halt the offensive of the Red Army on this mighty water barrier.

On 15 September the order was given to move the main body of Group of Armies "South" back across the Dnieper. In its directive, the fascist German command demanded of its troops that in no case would they permit the Red Army to force the Dnieper and that they hold the new position to the last man.¹

The invaders comforted themselves with the hope that they would be able to rest and hold out behind the fortifications of the Eastern Rampart. However they were not up to holding the Red Army back even on the Dnieper.

To prevent the fascist German command from creating a powerful defense on the Dnieper, the GHQ of the Supreme Command as early as the beginning of September pointed out to the fronts the necessity of forcing it from the move and seizing bases of operation on the right bank which would provide for the deployment of forces for the offensive against the Right-Bank Ukraine.

In mid September large units of the right wing and center of the Voronezh Front moved swiftly toward the Dnieper. In pursuit of the enemy, the tankers of Lt Gen P. S. Rybalko's Third Guards Tank Army were first of the Front troops to move up to the river toward the end of 21 September. At this time the enemy did not have considerable forces on the opposite (right) bank of the Dnieper. A shallow defensive strip was formed consisting of trenches and basically occupied by combat engineer units in separate sectors. Indi-

¹See *Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945*, V. 3, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1964, p. 309.

vidual centers of defense were created on some axes at a depth of 8-10 kilometers from the first defense zone.

The forcing of the Dnieper began under difficult circumstances in the zone of advance of the Voronezh Front. In the course of pursuing the enemy in the Left-Bank Ukraine, our troops stretched out to a great depth. The artillery fell behind due to a lack of fuel, and there were no heavy crossing means. Although the enemy suffered considerable losses, he was able to move his troops across the Dnieper and take up the defense on the high, steep right bank, which in places was precipitous.

On 22 September advance detachments of Third Guards Tank Army began forcing the river southeast of Kiev in the Bukrin bend. At the same time advance units of Fortieth Army moved up to the Dnieper to the right of the tankers. A company of submachine gunners of the 51st Guards Tank Brigade was one of the first to cross. It seized the village of Grigorovka.

This was the beginning of the creation of a base of operations in the Bukrin bend of the Dnieper which was important for subsequent combat on the Right Bank. Here it was planned to deploy the main body of the Front and take up the offense with the aim of liberating the Right-Bank Ukraine.¹

Large units of the airborne forces also took part in operations by troops of the Voronezh, and later of the Steppe, Front to force the river and seize bases of operations on its right bank. Unfortunately, the authors of Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945 gg had no opportunity to tell the reader the details about the employment of an airborne landing force on the Dnieper, although it was made up of over 10,000 parachutists. In addition, not a word is said about the fact that when Fifty-Second Army, under the command of Lt Gen K. A. Koroteyev, forced the Dnieper in the middle of November in the vicinity of Cherkassy this operation was conducted in close coordination with units of Lt Col P. M. Sidorchuk's 5th Airborne Brigade, which captured and held a base of operations north of Cherkassy.

In the book Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945. Kratkaya istoriya there are only a few lines about the use of airborne landing forces in the forcing of the Dnieper.

"In order to seize a base of operations on the right bank of the Dnieper the Front command made use of the airborne troops. On the night of 23/24 September a drop was made of the 3rd and part of the 5th airborne brigades. However, the drop zones were poorly marked, and the crews were poorly trained. As a result, the main body of the airborne troops unexpectedly fell into the center of disposition of the German troops and suffered heavy losses without accomplishing its mission."²

¹See Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945, v. 3, pp 324-325.

²Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945. Kratkaya istoriya, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1967, p. 261.

It seems possible and advisable to tell in more detail about the airborne troops' participation in forcing the Dnieper.

Even during the battles to liberate the Left-Bank Ukraine, the GHQ of the Supreme Command gave instructions to the command of airborne forces to conduct intensified training of large units to seize bases of operations on major water barriers. In August 1943 the author of these lines was Chief of Staff of the control group for large tactical exercises involving the landing of the 3rd Airborne Brigade. A sector was picked on the bank of the Moskva River in the vicinity of Ramenskoye, Verkhneye Myachkovo, and Nizhneye Myachkovo similar in many respects to the area of the right bank of the Dnieper in the Bukrin bend. These exercises were conducted at the end of the summer of 1943 with the 1st, 5th, and other airborne brigades.

On 17 September, when favorable conditions had developed for the subsequent development of the offensive with the forcing of the Dnieper, the GHQ of the Supreme Command made the decision to employ a major airborne landing force in the zone of advance of troops of the Voronezh (later the First Ukrainian) Front. The airborne troops were to seize an important base of operations in the Bukrin bend of the Dnieper before the enemy organized a firm defense on the river, and prevent the move of enemy reserves to this base before the main shock grouping of troops of the Voronezh Front concentrated there.

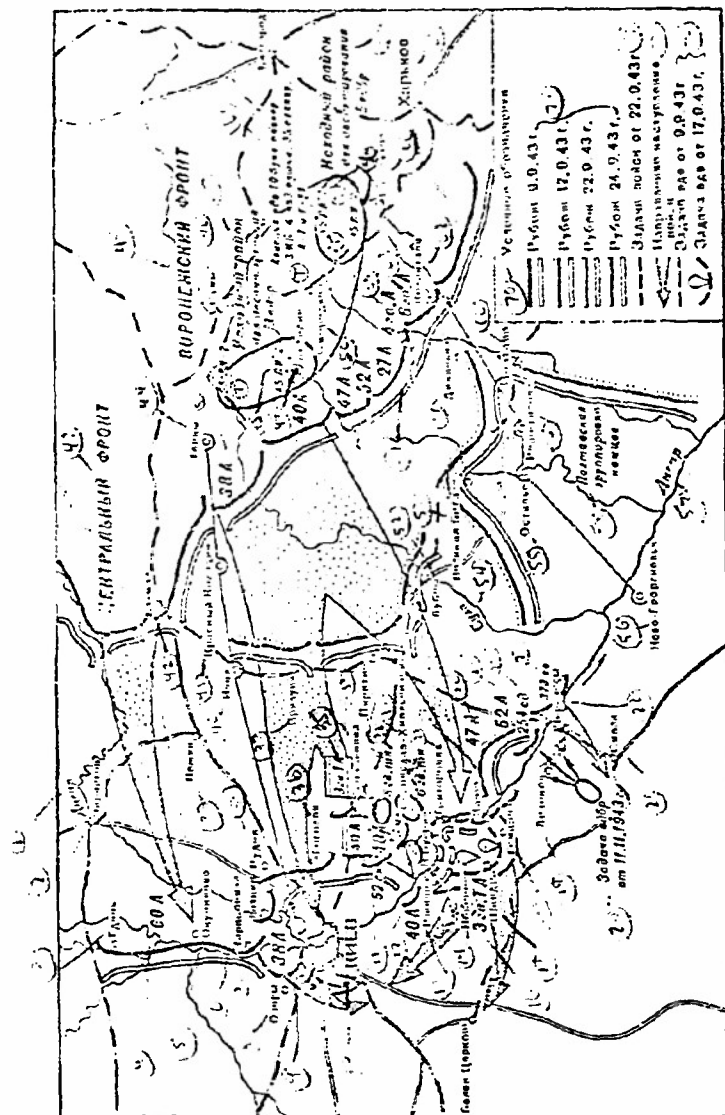
The 1st, 3rd, and 5th airborne brigades were detached from the airborne forces and placed at the disposal of the Commander of Voronezh Front in the beginning of September 1943 for accomplishment of the assigned mission. In view of the fact that all brigades were designated for joint operations in the same area, they were united into an airborne corps. The Deputy Commander of Airborne Forces, Maj Gen I. I. Zatevakhin, was named Corps Commander. A Corps staff was hurriedly formed from officers of the Administration, but it did not have the necessary means of control. Brigade commanders were: 1st -- Col P. I. Krasovskiy; 3rd -- Col P. A. Goncharov; 5th -- Lt Col P. M. Sidorchuk.

The corps numbered over 10,000 parachutists. One hundred eighty Li-2 aircraft were made available for landing the parachute group of the force, and 10 tow aircraft with 35 gliders were used for landing guns and heavy equipment.

It was planned to complete the concentration of troops and materiel for the airborne operation two days before beginning the operation, which was planned for the night of 23/24 September 1943. The force's mission was assigned by the Commander of the Voronezh Front.

The airborne brigades were formed in April 1943, and their preparations for the landing and combat operations were conducted at permanent stations until 17 September.

In spite of the fact that there was sufficient time for training for the landing operation at permanent stations, the problems of supplying the brigades with fuels and lubricants, engineering and signal equipment, and clothing and other equipment were not fully resolved.



Operational situation in the zone of Voronezh Front in September 1943 and airborne landing force missions

KEY: 1. Dnieper River; 2. Chernigov; 3. Gden; 4. Sixtieth Army; 5. Okuninovo; 6. Tarasovichi; 7. Lotki; 8. Ozery; 9. Thirty-Eighth Army; 10. Kiev; 11. 52nd Rifle Corps; 12. Fortieth Army; 13. Rzhishchev; 14. Yablonev; 15. Belaya Tserkov; 16. Third Guards Tank Army; 17. Shandra; 18. Gamaray; 19. Lozovok; 20. Airborne brigade mission of 11 Nov 1943; 21. Smela; 22. Cherkassy; 23. 373rd Rifle [letter unreadable]; 24. 254th Rifle Div; 25. Fifty-Second Army; 26. Forty-Seventh Army; 27. Kanev; 28. Grigorovka; 29. Verkhniy Bukvin; 30. 6th Gds Tank Corps; 31. Pereyaslav-Khmel'nitakiy; 32. 8th Gds Tank Corps; 33. Piryatiki; 34. Baryshevka; 35. Third Guards Tank Army; 36. Gogolev; 37. Priluki; 38. Rudnya; [continued on next page]

39. Nezhin; 40. Ichnya; 41. Krasnyy Kolyadin; 42. Bakhmach; 43. Central Front; 44. Gorny; 45. Voronezh Front; 46. Sumy; 47. Initial area for landing operation by 3d Abn Brig; 48. Li-2 aircraft; 49. Lebedin; 50. Smorodino; 51. Bel'sk; 52. Lubny; 53. Velikaya Bogachka; 54. Sula River; 55. Ostap'ya; 56. Novo-Georgiyevsk; 57. Dnieper River; 58. German Poltava Grouping; 59. Reshetilovka; 60. Poltava; 61. Dikan'ka; 62. Kolontayev; 63. Sixth Gds Army; 64. Fourth Gds Army; 65. Khar'kov; 66. Bogodukhov; 67. Initial area for landing operation by 5th Abn Brig; 68. Belgorod; 69. Aviation: 10 tow planes, 3 IL-4 for guns, 35 A-7 and G-11 gliders. 70. Conventional signs; 71. position as of __; 72. mission of troops as of 22 September 1943; 73. direction of attack; 74. mission of airborne troops as of __.

The concentration of airborne forces in the initial area for the operation ended three days later than provided in the plan, in connection with the delay in providing support for the landing force, the great overload on the recently restored railroads, and a lack of a sufficient number of cars. In this regard the airborne troops had a little over a day in the initial area to complete preparations.

Moreover, a total of only eight aircraft had arrived on airfields in the initial area by the beginning of the operation due to bad weather conditions. The beginning was put off for a day, however even by this time the military transports were not able to fully mass.

On the morning of 23 September 1943 the Commander of Voronezh Front, Arm Gen N. F. Vatutin, arrived at the command post of Fortieth Army, in whose zone of advance lay the zone of operations of the airborne landing force.

The situation in the drop zone was not clear. Unfavorable weather conditions prevented using aerial reconnaissance to obtain information. There were no precise data on the enemy from other reconnaissance means as well.

In the middle of the day on 23 September the Front Commander clarified the missions of the airborne brigades through the Commander of Airborne Forces.

The goal of employment of the airborne landing force remained as before, to seize a base of operations on the right bank of the Dnieper and prevent the move of enemy reserves from the rear to the front.

Based on this, the Front Commander ordered two airborne brigades to make a landing in the enemy rear on the evening of the 24th and the night of 24/25 September 1943.

The 3rd Airborne Brigade received the mission of landing in the area bounded by a line excluding Tulintsy, Beresnyagi, and Chernyshy with the mission of seizing the position Lipovyy Rog, Makedony, Sinyavka, and Kazarovka and holding it until the arrival of units of Fortieth Army, advancing from the position Traktomirov, Zarubentsy; and preventing the move of enemy reserves from the west and southwest in the direction of the Dnieper bend.

The 5th Airborne Brigade was to land west of Kanev in the vicinity of Kovali, Kostyanets, and excluding Grishentsy, with the mission of seizing the position Gorkavshchina, Stepantsy, and excluding Sitniki, and holding it until the arrival of units of the Front attacking from the position Buchak, Selishche, and Kanev and preventing the move of enemy reserves from the south and southwest to the Dnieper bend.

According to the plan, the first trip would land the 1st Airborne Brigade, however it did not concentrate on the airfields in time, and the 3rd Airborne Brigade was dropped in its place. The 1st Airborne Brigade was placed in reserve in readiness to be dropped on the third night.

The clarification of the mission of the airborne landing force as provided to the Commander of Airborne Forces was made during the day on 23 September in the Headquarters of Fortieth Army, which was located 150 kilometers from the initial area. The entire day was used to clarify the mission, evaluate the situation, and make the decision. This was done by the Commander of Airborne Forces and the Corps Commander.

Brigade commanders made and announced their decisions on landing and combat operations only on the next day -- 1½ hours before personnel were loaded on the aircraft. In view of this, battalion commanders had only a very insufficient amount of time to pass on the mission to all personnel of the subunits being dropped, and company commanders had only 15 minutes before take-off for this purpose. There was no time at all left for platoon commanders to assign missions to their personnel. This they did in flight.

The lateness in mission assignments to units and subunits of the landing force deprived the commanders of the opportunity to clarify problems of coordination within the landing force and with other combat arms, to check on how subordinates understood the mission, and to map out a battle plan after landing in the enemy rear. Preflight drills were not conducted with personnel or officers, either on maps or on mock-ups of the terrain, in connection with the forthcoming mission.

In assigning missions for combat operations, brigade and battalion commanders limited themselves only to instructions on the drop zones, assembly after landing, and the position to be taken and defended.

As a result of the shallow explanation of the mission and estimate of the situation, commanders of all levels did not make the appropriate conclusions in regard to the required weaponry of the landing force as well.

As its subsequent mission, the force was to firmly hold the indicated position, which had to be prepared in the antitank and engineering sense, but a majority of the airborne troops had only small long-handled shovels, and a small number had axes. They had not taken large shovels with them.

With a limited amount of time for capture and preparation of a defensive position, the parachutists could not count on quickly digging in and firmly holding the position with such equipment as they had. They had not

even taken antitank mines, which, with the deficiency in antitank guns, could affect the firmness of the entire defense of the landing force.

All calculations on the weaponry and outfitting of the landing force were based on the assumption that front troops would move into the zone of combat operations of the landing force on the day after the landing. Therefore personnel were not even issued ponchos, in spite of the fact that it was autumn and there were light frosts at night.

Even before the airborne troops massed in the initial area the Headquarters of Voronezh Front had worked out a rather detailed plan for the operation. A major section of the plan was devoted to aviation support -- aerial reconnaissance, bomber and air assault strikes against the drop zone before the parachutists were dropped, fighter cover, and support of the combat operations of the landing force.

The air transports provided made it possible to land two brigades in one night, making three trips. The third brigade was readied for landing on the next night. It was planned to load at least 20 parachutists on each aircraft, and the gliders with heavy weapons would be landed between the drop of parachute echelons.

In organizing coordination with Front artillery, the plan recommended that artillery fire directors be dropped by parachute and that a squadron of artillery fire-directing aircraft be made available for directing artillery fire of the corps in the breakthrough.

It was also planned to send an operations group of the support aviation to the commander of the airborne landing force.

The rear service area of Voronezh Front provided material and technical support. It provided the Commander of the Airborne Corps with 100 vehicles for transporting men and cargoes to the airfields. It was planned to have on one of the airfields a special air group of 25 Li-2 aircraft for dropping the supplies for the landing force while it was conducting combat operations.

The Front rear service area provided for the concentration at depots nearest the airfields of one unit of fire and two issues of daily rations loaded into packing for the airborne landing.

Each trooper had with him $1\frac{1}{2}$ units of fire and two issues of dry rations. At the same time, one more unit of fire was dropped in containers.

The plan contained detailed instructions for organization of air defense of the initial area and for coordinated actions with partisans.

Strict limitations were placed on coded communications and cover and deception. For example, it was forbidden to use not only the radio, but also telegraph and telephone means to discuss problems of preparations for the landing. All airborne units were called replacement units.

To the plan for the airborne landing operation was attached the schedule for the landing, signed by the Commander of Airborne Forces and the Front Chief of Staff.

On 19 September Mar SU G. K. Zhukov, a representative of GHQ of the Supreme Command, looked over the plan for the operation, agreed with it, and made a large number of pertinent remarks.

The responsibility of assigning the missions to brigade commanders was placed personally on the Front Commander, Arm Gen N. F. Vatutin, after receipt of the latest reconnaissance information. All responsibility for preparing for the landing and combat operations lay with the Commander of Airborne Forces, and responsibility for the landing lay with Deputy Commander of Long-Range Aviation, Lt Gen Avn N. S. Skripko.

Air support for the landing and combat operations by the landing force was provided by Second Air Army, commanded by Col Gen Avn S. A. Krasovskiy.

The representative of GHQ demanded that, for the purpose of preserving concealment of preparations for the operation, no mutual information be provided to the Commander of the landing force and to the large units forcing the Dnieper -- "let each one know what he has to, and only that." He recommended setting up barrage artillery fire in the southern sector of defense of the landing force in order to prevent the movement of reserves into the drop zone. After landing, each parachutist was obligated to camouflage his chute, so that it would be impossible to determine the number of parachutists and the landing site from parachutes lying on the ground.

The situation at the front and in the rear of the enemy forces at the beginning of the air drop was as described below.

Troops of Voronezh Front on 22 September approached the Dnieper in the main body in pursuit of the enemy, and were at a distance of 10-20 kilometers from the bank. Advance detachments of Third Guards Tank Army forced the river and seized bases of operations near Zarubentsy and Grigorovka. On the same day troops of Fortieth and Forty-Seventh armies received the order to force the Dnieper in the Bukrin bend by the end of 26 September and move to the position captured by the airborne landing force, expanding it toward the flanks.

Third Guards Tank Army was to make use of the base of operations captured by airborne troops for massing troops and continuing the attack against Kagarlyk and Belaya Tserkov'.

At the time advance detachments of Third Guards Tank Army moved to the Dnieper on 21 September, the enemy was not occupying a defense on the right bank in the sector Traktovirov and Grigorovka. Here there was only one crew of 50-60 men occupied in constructing defenses.

After halting the approaching troops, the enemy urgently began moving the 10th Motorized, 167th Infantry, and 19th Panzer divisions into the area of the bend in the sector Rzhishchev and Kanev. Advance units of these divisions appeared here during the day on 21 September.

On the night of 21/22 September advance detachments of tank corps began forcing the Dnieper under extremely difficult conditions and without organic crossing equipment. Small advance elements of Third Guards Tank Army succeeded in driving the enemy only from Zarubentsy and Grigorevka. They were not able to exploit the success achieved, since they did not have sufficient men or materiel for this.

The enemy rather quickly massed considerable forces and attempted to throw the advance elements back into the river and prevent further crossings of the Dnieper by Soviet forces. This he did by means of continuous counterattacks by tanks and infantry supported by aviation.

On 24 September the enemy moved troops into the Bukrin bend which had crossed from the left bank near Kanev. By the end of 24 September the 112th and 255th infantry divisions had also appeared here.

Thus, immediately before the airborne landing operation the enemy had massed up to five or six divisions in the Bukrin bend, and units of two more divisions were moving in. In the three days before the airborne landing, the enemy concentrated in the Bukrin bend of the Dnieper major forces, which were mainly located in populated points and which formed around them strong points and centers of resistance. This was in those very areas where it was planned to drop the 3rd and 5th Guards airborne brigades. This abrupt change in the situation in the drop zone was not established in time by Front reconnaissance operating on this axis.

The Landing

On the morning of 24 September 1943 the brigades began massing supplies directly on the airfields near where the aircraft would park. The planes kept arriving throughout the day.

In coordinating problems of the landing with air unit commanders, it became clear that the planned number of aircraft would not be concentrated on all airfields. And at the time subunits of the 5th Airborne Brigade arrived at the field to load supplies and get on the aircraft, the Brigade had only 48 of the planned 65 Li-2 aircraft.

The massing of transports on the airfields was hindered due to poor weather conditions and did not correspond to plans. Reduction of the number of aircraft right before take-off disrupted all calculations. In addition, the plan provided that each plane would take on 20 units (16-18 parachutists and 4-2 cargo containers). But when they began loading, many aircraft commanders stated that they would not take more than 15-18 units. This in turn introduced confusion in the calculations right before take-off.

In connection with a reduction in the number of planes on the airfields and the loading norms, subunit commanders were forced to redistribute men and cargoes among the aircraft just before take-off. In so doing, they left a portion of the supplies on the airfields so as to take more men. Much time was wasted on all these corrections in calculations, which led to a disruption of the overall landing plan.

Brigade headquarters made inexcusable errors in compiling schedules and making calculations for the landing operation. Many commanders of battalions and even brigades did not take crews of radio stations onto their aircraft, while Col V. K. Goncharov, Commander of 3rd Guards Airborne Brigade, took the entire Brigade command element on his plane.

It had been arranged that drop zones would be marked by bonfires in the form of a rectangle. Assembly areas were to be found by colored flares and by recognition and communication signals. Imitation bird and animal calls and whistles were used.

There was bad weather on the eve of the landing, and for this reason they did not succeed in dropping their parachute scouts to obtain reliable information about the enemy in the drop zone and to establish contact with the partisans.

The operation was conducted from four airfields under favorable weather conditions.

The take-off of the first aircraft with parachutists of 3rd Guards Airborne Brigade began at 1830 hours on 24 September, and the first parachutists of 5th Guards Airborne Brigade took off two hours later.

A deficiency in fueling equipment meant that the first wave of aircraft had to take off at intervals of 10 minutes, and not in the sequence established by commanders of the large air units, but according to when they were fueled. As a result, 10 aircraft of the first wave could take off only with the second wave.

Aircraft of the first wave returned from their mission in a different sequence than that in which they had taken off. This was an indication that some aircraft did not hold to the itinerary and mode of operation.

A very great deal of time was wasted in refueling aircraft for the next take-off. The airborne troops had to go around the airfield seeking aircraft ready for take-off, and transfer from one to another. The fuel servicing trucks were disorganized in their work, and there was an extremely limited number.

On the evening of the 24th and the night of 24/25 September, a total of 296 sorties were made from all airfields instead of the planned 500, and 4,575 parachutists and 666 light parachute bags with ammunition and rations were dropped.

A total of 2,017 men, or 30 percent of the parachutists, and 590 bags which were to have been dropped the first night were not dropped.

The improper distribution of communications gear and radio operators on the aircraft led to the fact that by the morning of 25 September there had been no communications with the airborne landing force which had been dropped. There were also no communications on subsequent days, right up to 6 October 1943.

No information was forthcoming from the dropped landing force. Therefore, further landing operations were cut short. The 1st Airborne Brigade and a large number of subunits of 5th Airborne Brigade were returned to their stations.



Approaching the target -- the right bank of the Dnieper

When they crossed the front lines, the aircraft entered a zone of heavy antiaircraft fire, which did not even abate when they made their runs over their target. In the majority of cases the parachutists were dropped while taking evasive action against antiaircraft artillery fire, at speeds over 200 kilometers per hour and from altitudes of from 600 to 2,000 meters.

It was extremely difficult for the aircraft crews to orient themselves. The group which was to mark the drop areas had not been dropped ahead of time. Navigators basically took their bearings from the Dnieper and from villages set on fire by partisans and Germans.

According to calculations, both brigades were to land under favorable conditions on an area 14 by 10 kilometers in size. In actuality, the force landed between Rzhishchev and Cherkassy. The main body of airborne troops of both airborne brigades was dropped in the bend of the Dnieper, directly into the enemy combat formations and in the places where enemy reserves were located. A considerable number landed outside the intended area.

With the disorder in dropping the landing force, parachutists of different units and subunits became mixed together after landing and fought as mixed groups under the command of officers unknown to them.

The large number of flares of various colors, both friendly and enemy, which were shot from the ground, and the numerous fires in the drop zones confused the signals established for assembly. The glow of fires and searchlights illuminated the men both in the air and after landing. The enemy met the parachutists in the air with heavy rifle and machine gun fire. Under these difficult conditions, the personnel of the 3rd and 5th airborne brigades displayed exceptionally high feelings of duty to the Motherland, in addition to bravery and persistence. The parachutists fired upon the enemy from the air with rifles and submachine guns, and threw hand grenades down on him.

For example, Pvt Anisimov was fired upon by a machine gun while still in the air. He put the crew out of action with a successful toss of a grenade and landed successfully near the village of Malyy Bukrin. Two parachutists landed right on the firing positions of antiaircraft machine guns. While still in the air, the troopers opened fire from submachine guns, killing one and wounding seven antiaircraft gunners.

Parachutist Drozdov landed in the village of Chernyshy right on a German field kitchen. Two soldiers near the kitchen were killed by a grenade tossed accurately from the air. After overturning the kitchen and seizing the cook's submachine gun, the trooper made off.

One of the parachutists got his parachute hooked up on the cross of a church in the village of Grushevo. He was in a tough spot, between heaven and earth. The Hitlerites evidently decided to take him prisoner, but the Guards airborne trooper put his back to the wall and opened fire, killing six enemy soldiers before he himself was killed. The next day local inhabitants removed the hero and buried him. These are not just isolated examples. They speak of the exceptionally difficult circumstances under which the airborne troops had to enter battle.

The fact that radio operators were greatly scattered and radios were failing to work for technical reasons led to a situation where a majority of unit commanders were without means of control for a long time.

After the landing and assembly, only five low-power radios could operate from among all those dropped. The fate of 26 others, including four from the operations group of Corps Headquarters, was unknown.

Some radio operators buried their sets in the ground so as to preserve them for future use. Some of them kept their sets and tried to come up in communications in the designated net, but did not succeed due to the absence of radio operating data. This was in the hands of the communications officers, about whose location nothing was known. One 12-RP radio station contacted a Front radio station, but could not at first engage in traffic due to the absence of radio operating data. However, later Lt Col P. M. Sidorchuk

succeeded in speaking "in the clear" with the left bank of the Dnieper. He was recognized by his voice and by test questions put by his Deputy, Lt Col M. B. Ratner, who was dropped together with a group by mistake on the wrong side of the river.

All radios in the hands of commanders of separate detachments were basically used for internal communications, since they, too, had no radio operating data for communications with the Front Staff. Only on 6 October did the Front Staff succeed in establishing long-distance radio communications with the airborne landing force and dropping it supplementary means of communication. From 15 October on, the landing force had contact with the Front Staff over two radio channels by using the Sever and RB radio sets. Due to a deficiency in power sources, only two RB radio sets and one IZ-RP were used for communications within the landing force. All radios were concentrated in the Brigade HQ, and were made available for work in the battalions depending on the mission assigned the battalion.

The Base of Operations

Due to the great dispersion during the drop, the parachutists were forced to fight the enemy throughout the night and day of 24/25 September as small, scattered groups without communications and control on the part of senior commanders.

The enemy took the appearance of our first aircraft as a bomber raid, and the landing of the first parachutists was unexpected. In some places the Hitlerites, caught by surprise, ran from the houses and tried to take cover. But after they learned the situation, they quickly brought their units into combat readiness and began active operations against the Soviet paratroopers. The terrain was well illuminated by searchlights, flares, and the glow of fires. Having learned the meaning of our signals marking the drop point for the aircraft and the assembly area for subunits, they began to duplicate them, thus throwing off the paracutists and pilots.

Thus the mass of bonfires, glowing embers, and varicolored flares of both friendly and enemy troops illuminated the terrain well and facilitated the Hitlerites' battle against the parachutists on land and in the air.

The assembly by the airborne troops was difficult and risky under these circumstances.

For example, the Commander of 5th Guards Airborne Brigade, Lt Col Sidorchuk, after landing in the vicinity of the Kanev Forest, met a soldier of the 3rd Guards Airborne Brigade within an hour, by morning had gathered five men, and for eight days sought out and united around himself small groups of airborne troops. He met the officers and men who jumped from the same plane as he did only on the ninth day after his landing.

The saturation of the drop zone by enemy troops and the antilanding measures taken by them made it impossible for a long time for separate small

groups and individual parachutists to go boldly toward the signals designating assembly area or their subunits.

Previously arranged signals for the landing force to assemble (flares) flew up from different directions and were lost among the hundreds of flares of different colors sent up by the enemy with the aim of disorienting the paratroopers. Nevertheless, many parachutists silently approached the places from which the flares were sent up, established whether they were false, and after bypassing enemy ambushes, continued to seek out their commanders and subunits. In trying to unite for combat actions as quickly as possible, airborne troops of some subunits assembled on signals established for other subunits. However many of them, not knowing the assembly signals for adjacent subunits, did not respond to them even though they were very close, taking them to be false signals.

With the coming of daylight it became easier for the troopers to get their bearings and find one another and adjacent groups. But the enemy also became more aggressive at this time, sending out small and large mobile anti-landing detachments to destroy the airborne troops.

As a result of the night and day assemblies which took place under extremely difficult conditions, by the end of the day of 25 September 35 groups had gathered and begun combat actions in various places of a broad region. They were completely isolated from each other and were without means of communication and heavy weapons. These groups included a total of 2,300 men from the overall total of 4,575 which were dropped on the night of 24/25 September.

This number did not include those parachutists which attached themselves to nine partisan detachments and operated in the vicinity of Kanev, Cherkassy, and Korsun'-Shevchenkovskiy (imeni Pozharskiy, Grcznyy, Shevchenko, and others), and 230 men dropped on friendly territory and moving into the area of Front troops immediately after landing.

The largest groups of airborne troops were assembled and operated independently in the following areas: Kanev and Cherkassy Forests -- around 600 men; Chernyshy -- around 200 men; Yablonovo -- four groups with an overall total of around 300 men. Smaller groups operated in dozens of other areas.

All these groups and detachments began combat operations over a broad area in the enemy rear, and at the same time continued attempts to find each other and unite. Here, for example, is how individual soldiers and small groups operated in the first days after the landing.

On the northern edge of the village of Trostinets three guns were set up in firing positions, from which they fired on our troops across the Dnieper. While still in the air, Sgt Bzyrin saw the flashes of firing, got a line on their location, and after landing west of the battery about 500 meters, decided to destroy the guns without waiting to link up with other troops. The brave trooper was concealed by the darkness and bushes, and the flashes

of the guns guided him right to the target. After creeping right up on the battery, he killed a portion of the gun crews with unexpected fire from his submachine gun and with grenades, while the remaining soldiers ran off without waiting to learn who was attacking them. Bzyrin quickly removed the breach blocks one after another, threw them into a ravine, and made off himself.

Parachutist Gavrilov conducted observation from a well-camouflaged spot near the road from the village of Glincha. A light vehicle approached and an officer got out, stopped near the trooper, and checked his map against the terrain. Gavrilov unexpectedly got up, hit the officer a hard blow, and rushed to the vehicle. The driver did not get it started before Gavrilov quickly dispatched him, shoved the officer into the vehicle, and drove him to the area where his group was located.

Somehow the airborne troops learned that a Colonel who commanded an infantry regiment was to drive from the village of Moshny to Baybuzy to inspect the garrison.

Capt Telkov set up an ambush of three parachutists along the road from Moshny to Baybuzy. They were provided with one antitank mine for the road. Since the road was wide and they had but one mine, the troopers cut a tree branch not far from the road so that it hung down as if broken by the wind, covering a large portion of the road. There remained a narrow part that was passable with difficulty for a vehicle. To be completely sure of the vehicle being blown up, the troops made the mine movable by fixing a line to it, with the end of the line stretched to the ambush site. Everything was carefully camouflaged. Soon two vehicles appeared, the first containing three officers and the Colonel, and the second containing submachine gunners. The first one braked sharply to bypass the green barrier, and the second closely approached the other. The submachine gunners jumped from their vehicle and took the branch away. As soon as the first vehicle moved out, an explosion sounded. The mission was accomplished without losses on the part of the airborne troops.

The most difficult job was collecting the parachute containers with equipment and cargoes and making use of them to accomplish the combat mission. The enemy took all steps to capture the supplies and the parachutists. They formed special teams and left ambushes at the site of dropped supplies in an attempt to take prisoners. For example, Sgt Modzilevskiy was heading for a parachute bag lying on the ground, but decided to approach it, not over open terrain, but along a ravine and through the brush. On emerging from the ravine, he spotted three enemy submachine gunners at the edge of the brush. They were watching the place where the supplies were laying. Approaching them from the rear without being noticed, the Sergeant dispatched them with one burst.

In many cases the airborne troops could not make use of the supplies, ammunition, and equipment they found due to the small size of the groups. Thus they had to either destroy or bury the supplies they had found with difficulty so as to deny them to the enemy.

Subsequently the situation in which individual groups and detachments of the landing force operated was also complicated by the fact that they began to come to the end of their ammunition and felt a sharp deficiency in rations. In spite of this, the parachutists continued to fight, displaying bravery and stubbornness in battle.

The entire area of combat operations of the landing force could be broken down into the northern and southern: the northern, from Rzhishchev to the southeast along the Dnieper to Kanev, and the southern, from Kanev also to the southeast along the Dnieper to Cherkassy.

The northern region had few forests. Groves, bushes, and ravines could serve as temporary cover for small groups, but the area was inconvenient for large group operations, especially during the day. In addition, the enemy had in this area a dense network of garrisons directly tied in with the tactical defensive zone along the Dnieper, and had favorable conditions for battling the airborne landing force.

In spite of this, around 20 groups operated in the northern region. This included over 1,100 men, plus four large detachments of 100-150 men each.

The southern region was more broken and had many large forests for cover, such as the Kanev, Tagancha, Mikhaylov and Cherkassy forests.

Moreover, there were smaller forests which were convenient for operations such as the Maslovo Forest, Kozin Grove, and others. The large number of rivers, swamps, and ravines and the low density of populated points created the most favorable conditions for operations by airborne groups and detachments. In addition, around nine small partisan detachments operated in this very same area. Soon one, then another partisan detachment commander reported on the airborne troops which joined them. It later turned out that there were many of these troops.

The combat operations of groups and detachments operating in the northern region were affected by the superior enemy forces and the limited opportunities for maneuver. Therefore the majority of such groups and detachments, which had no communications among themselves and which knew nothing of the more or less favorable situation for the landing force in the southern area, aimed to move out of the northern area across the front line to link up with units of Fortieth and Third Guards Tank Army.

Although the scattered groups and detachments of airborne troops operating in the northern region could not exert much effort on behalf of the Front troops or accomplish the mission assigned the force as a whole, their appearance in the enemy rear and their aggressive operations pinned down and drew off a considerable number of enemy forces and inflicted heavy losses in men and materiel.

This period of operations was highly praised even by the enemy, who was forced to recognize the courage, skill and will for victory of the Soviet

paratroopers. In one of its orders of 7 October 1943, the Headquarters of Eighth Army noted: "It was especially difficult to locate the hiding places of parachute detachments. It has been established repeatedly that the enemy is excellent at concealing himself in ravines which have been examined by us many times. He prefers narrow slit trenches along the edges of ravines, and camouflages them with dirt and brush. It is genuinely difficult to find such shelters if the enemy doesn't accidentally give himself away...

...If our reconnaissance groups succeeded in finding such cover, then the enemy, using snipers and at the same time informing the main body of the detachment, would try to get rid of pesky observers without firing a shot by shouts of "Ura" and noise. As soon as the main body were alerted and assembled they would offer stubborn, heroic resistance while using up a minimum amount of ammunition. But even when the enemy had no ammunition, he attacked and defended with unprecedented fanaticism.

Every airborne trooper was armed with a knife, which he was skillful in using."

Operations by groups and detachments of the airborne force were most successful in the southern area. Here over 1,200 men operated in such groups, largest of which were the detachments of Sr Lt Ye. G. Tkachev, Capt N. R. Krotov, Maj M. N. Zhernosekov, Maj V. F. Fofanov, Sr Lt Ye. K. Akhramovich, and others.

In battles from 22 through 29 September troops of Voronezh Front were not able to capture a base of operations on the right bank of the Dnieper which was large enough for subsequently developing the offensive, and did not link up with the airborne force. Until the end of September, while repulsing enemy counterattacks, troops of Voronezh Front were able to expand the Eukrin base of operations only up to 11 kilometers across the front and six kilometers in depth. The main bodies of Twenty-Seventh and Fortieth armies, as well as motorized rifle units of Third Guards Tank Army, were concentrated here. However, these armies had little artillery and tanks, while the enemy brought up the 19th Panzer, 10th Motorized, and several infantry divisions. Fierce battles were waged in which both sides suffered serious losses.

Under such conditions the landing force of course could not occupy the area intended. On 5 October 1943 several separate groups and detachments of airborne troops (around 600 men) massed in Kanev Forest. They were united into an airborne brigade by the Commander of 5th Airborne Brigade, Lt Col P. M. Sidorchuk. It was made up of three battalions, a combat engineer platoon, an antitank rifle platoon, a reconnaissance platoon, and a communications platoon. On 6 October there appeared a group of communicators with a radio set, with which they succeeded for the first time in establishing communications with Fortieth Army, and through it with the Front Headquarters.

Beginning on 6 October, this airborne brigade became an organized combat unit, waged active reconnaissance and diversionary operations in the enemy rear, and continued to attach to itself scattered groups and detachments of airborne troops.

During the period from 8 through 11 October the Operations Group of the HQ of Airborne Forces arranged the delivery by air of rations and ammunition to the landing force, both by parachute drops and by landing aircraft in the area of combat operations.

When the enemy had fixed the position of the landing force in Kanev Forest, he undertook several attacks from the morning of 11 October, but they were successfully repulsed by the airborne troops throughout the day, with heavy losses for the enemy. Soon, with the authorization of the Front Commander, the airborne troops moved into the Tagancha Forest.

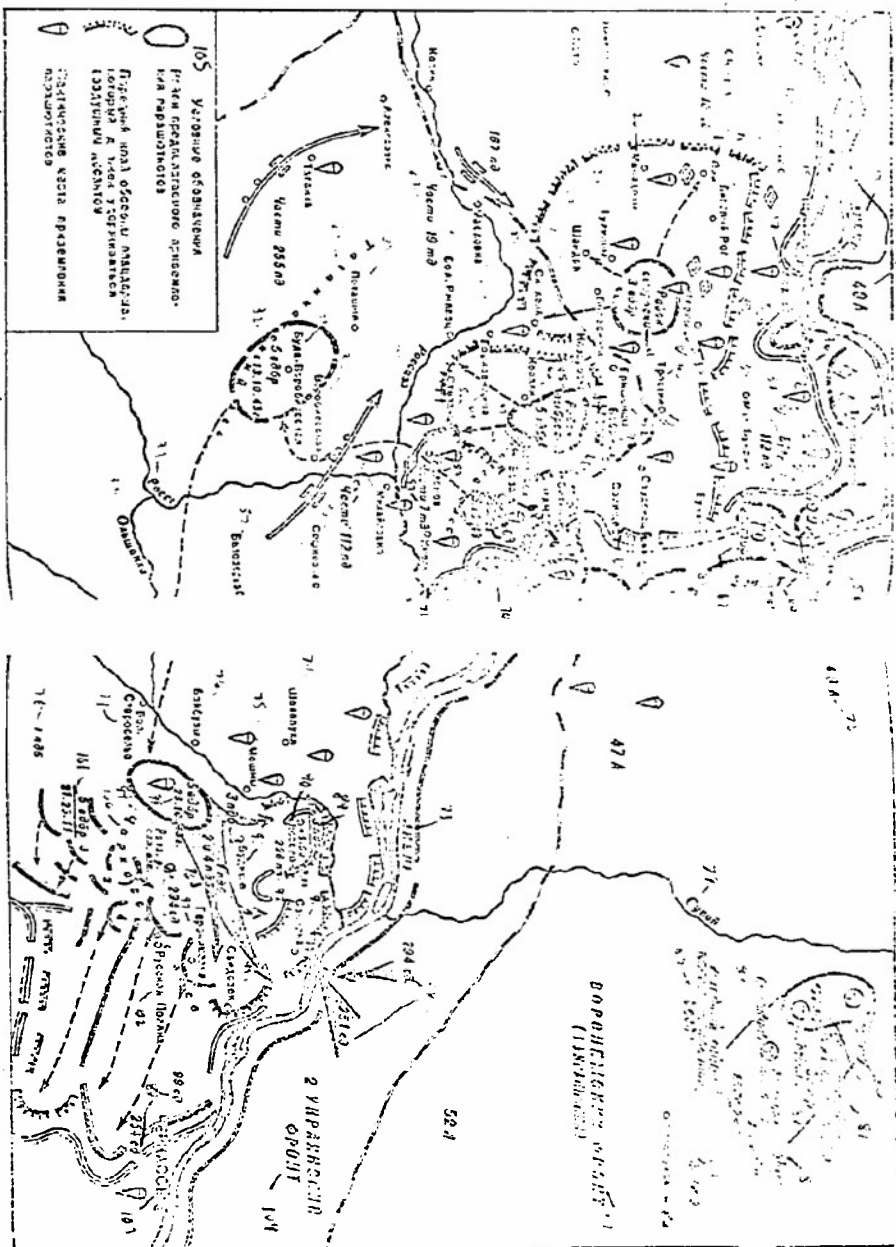
So the Soviet airborne troops were operating in the immediate enemy rear. They created a tense situation, and demoralized the Hitlerites sitting in earth-and-wood pillboxes and trenches on the right bank of the Dnieper. The paratroopers were not to be caught. The enemy was forced to bring in special forces to battle them. At first the Hitlerites did not risk moving into the forest. Later, after gathering considerable forces, they decided to attack the paratroopers in the forest, but the Guards paratroopers were ready to repulse the attacks. They set up an all-around defense in the forest. In some sectors where there were small hills, weapons were set up in many tiers. All approaches to them were accessible to machine gun fire.

From the morning of 23 October, having brought up considerable forces with tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces, the enemy throughout the day repeatedly made attacks in an attempt to destroy the landing force and fully blockade it in Tagancha Forest. However all enemy attacks were successfully repulsed by the paratroopers.

The forest rang with the constant bursts of mines and shells, and with rifle and machine gun fire. Men were deafened by this din. Lt Col Sidorchuk went around the subunits encouraging the men, demanding that they maintain a firm defense until the onset of darkness. Attack came after attack. All the airborne reserves were committed. Twilight was falling when the enemy went into his fifth attack, but the paratroopers withstood this one, too. The Hitlerites, fearing the forest at night, moved out their rather thinned units and blocked all exits from the forest.

It was dangerous to wait for another day like the last one. The Brigade Commander decided to move out from under the blow of superior enemy forces with the onset of darkness. After a thorough reconnaissance and making use of the darkness, the brigade subunits began to move out of the Tagancha Forest in the direction of Baybuzy and further into the Cherkassy Forest.

On the night of 25/26 October the Brigade arrived in the Cherkassy Forest in an area northeast of Bol'shoye Starosel'ye. Sr Lt Tkachev's detachment of 300 men also moved to that place. Since the Brigade strength had increased to 1,200 men in the period from 27 through 30 October 1943, one more battalion and separate subunits were formed. The Brigade was fully armed, due to weapons and ammunition dropped from the air.



Landing force missions and course of combat operations of 5th Airborne Brigade (September-November 1943)
 [Key on next page]

KEY: 1. Rzhishchev; 2. 34th Inf Div; 3. Okatski; 4. Yanivka; 5. units of 10th Cav Div; 6. Nikolayevka; 7. Potok; 8. 167th Inf Div; 9. Kozin; 10. Alekseyevka; 11. Tagancha; 12. units of 255th Inf Div; 13. Army; 14. Dnieper River; 15. Shchuchinka; 16. Mlyaniki; 17. Khodorov; 18. Lipovyy Rog; 19. Pin; 20. Makedony; 21. Tulintsy; 22. Shandra; 23. Beresnyagi; 24. Sinyavka; 25. Maslovka; 26. Bol'shoy Rzhavets; 27. units of 19th Panzer Div; 28. Potashnya; 29. Tagancha Forest; 30. Vorobiyevskaya; 31. Buda-Vorobiyevskaya; 32. 5th Abn Brig; 33. Rossa River; 34. Ol'shanka River; 35. Traktovirov; 36. Belyy Bukrin; 37. combat group of 112th Inf Div; 38. Valyy Bukrin; 39. Chernyshi; 40. Troshchin; 41. drop zone of 3rd Abn Brig; 42. Grishentsy; 43. Bobritsa; 44. Kozarovka; 45. drop zone of 5th Abn Brig; 46. Kovali; 47. Kostyanets; 48. Kanev Forest; 49. Gorkavishchina; 50. Stelantsy; 51. Rossava River; 52. Yablonov; 53. units of 7th Panzer Div; 54. Mikhaylovka; 55. units of 112th Inf Div; 56. Sofiyevka; 57. Beloz'er'ye; 58. Zarubentsy; 59. forward detachment of 9th Mech Corps; 60. Third Guards Tank Army; 61. Grigorovka; 62. 51st Gds Tank Brig; 63. Buchak; 64. Studenets; 65. Selishche; 66. Sitniki; 67. Kanev; 68. Bovany; 69. 5th Abn Brig as of 5 October 1943; 70. rifle regt of 206th Rifle Div; 71. Khivel'na; 72. Army; 73. Dnieper; 74. Shalepukhi; 75. Moshny; 76. Baybuzy; 77. Bol'shoye Starosel'ye; 78. 1st Abn Bn; 79. Supoy River; 80. Li-2 aircraft; 81. initial area for landing operation by 3rd Abn Brig; 82. Lebedin; 83. aviation for the airborne troops: 10 tow planes, ZIL-4 for artillery pieces, 35 A-7 and G-11 gliders; 84. Smorodino; 85. initial area for landing operation by 5th Abn Brig; 86. Bogodukhov; 87. Voronezh Front (First Ukrainian); 88. rifle division; 89. 3rd Abn Bn; 90. Lozovok; 91. Sakirka; 92. 226th Inf Regt; 93. Budishche; 94. 3rd Abn Bn; 95. Svidovok; 96. airborne battalions; 97. Geronimovka; 98. 5th Abn Brig as of 26 Oct 1943; 99. reconnaissance company and combat engineer platoon; 100. Cherkassy Forest; 101. 5th Abn Brig; 102. Russkaya Polyana; 103. Cherkassy; 104. Second Ukrainian Front; 105. conventional signs: area proposed for parachute landings; forward edge of defense of the base of operations to be held by the airborne landing force; actual landing area of parachutists.

Brigade subunits took up a defense in the vicinity of Cherkassy Forest and continued to conduct active combat operations against the enemy by disrupting troop control and rear area operations. Before the arrival of the airborne troops, the partisans were the masters of the Cherkassy Forest. Around 1,000 families -- women, old men, and children, were concentrated here. The Brigade had to take on itself not only protection of the people, but also their feeding. In addition to the functioning, but limited, supply by air, supply specialists obtained some things from local sources with the help of the existing underground Ukrainian Communist Party Rayon Committee. The paratroopers frequently organized provisions "expeditions" -- raids on enemy rear areas. They almost never came back empty-handed. During the period from 28 October through 11 November reconnaissance and diversionary groups of the Brigade blew up bridges, destroyed transport columns, disrupted enemy communications, and made bold raids on enemy garrisons. The enemy began to move new forces into Cherkassy Forest in order to first blockade the landing force, then destroy it.

At this time the paratroopers had reconnoitered in detail the enemy defenses along the Dnieper in the tactical depth, and all information was

passed on to the Headquarters of Second Ukrainian Front, in whose zone the Brigade was operating. Since the troops of this Front were preparing to force the river, the Brigade Commander established direct communications with Headquarters of Fifty-Second Army, which was operating on the Cherkassy Axis.

A Blow Against Enemy Defenses From the Rear

On 11 November 1943 the Brigade Commander received an order from the Commander of Fifty-Second Army to attack on the night of 12/13 November with the mission of capturing Lozovok, Sekirna, and Svidovok and support the crossing of the Dnieper by units operating from the front.

A liaison officer arrived from Fifty-Second Army on the night of 11/12 November to arrange coordination. He reported to the Brigade Commander the order of crossing by troops of Army, clarified the mission to the Brigade, and familiarized himself with the decision of the Brigade Commander.

The paratroopers were to conduct combat operations in the sector where the 254th Rifle Division was to cross. This Division had the mission of forcing the river on the night of 12/13 November in the Svidovok, Sekirna sector at the same time as, or after the airborne brigade took the populated points of Lozovok, Sekirna, and Svidovok.

The Hitlerites had the following strength in these strong points: in Lozovok -- up to an infantry battalion with combat engineer subunits; in Yelizavetovka -- two companies of 266th Infantry Regiment of 72nd Infantry Division; and in Svidovok -- up to an infantry battalion with five tanks.

After receiving all available information on the enemy and reconnoitering the axes along which the Brigade would hit the enemy defenses from the rear, the Brigade Commander made the following decision: 2nd and 4th Battalions would attack the most heavily fortified strong point of Svidovok, which covered a former ferry crossing and a ford; 1st Battalion would take Sekirna by a surprise attack; 3rd Battalion would take Lozovok. The two partisan detachments were given the mission to occupy the populated point of Budishche and prevent the enemy from moving from the direction of Moshny toward Lozovok. This was to ensure the Brigade was not attacked by enemy reserves as it was capturing Sekirna and Lozovok.

By 0100 hours on 13 November 1943 the Brigade's subunits moved to the initial position for the attack and at the signal of the Brigade Commander they simultaneously attacked all enemy strong points in accordance with the decision. The mission assigned the Brigade was accomplished by 0500 hours after stubborn fighting. Most of the enemy were killed, and only a few succeeded in escaping. In Lozovok two artillery batteries and up to 40 vehicles were captured by just the subunits of 3rd Battalion. By 0500 hours the Battalion took up the defense on the southwestern outskirts of Lozovok and along the bank of the Ol'shanka River to the Dnieper. It repulsed continuous enemy counterattacks. By 1100 hours on that same day the 1st Battalion took Sekirna.

During almost all of 13 November the Brigade held the captured strong points and the Dnieper bank in the sector from Svidovok to Lozovok, but units of 254th Rifle Division were not ready to force the river on this day, and that night the Brigade subunits were forced to abandon all captured populated points, but continued to operate between them along the Dnieper. The operations by the airborne brigade drew the enemy's attention away from troops of Fifty-Second Army, which were preparing for the forced crossing. Thanks to this, the 254th Rifle Division was able to cross about 800 men to the right bank of the Dnieper on the night of 13/14 November and captured a small base of operations to the north of Svidovok.

The airborne brigade regrouped and by 1900 hours on 15 November had taken Svidovok and linked up with the 254th Rifle Division. By the morning of 16 November the 3rd and 4th battalions again forced the enemy from Sekirna, thus expanding the base of operations and the sector of crossing for units of Fifty-Second Army.

On this day units of 254th Rifle Division took the populated point of Geronimovka and entered into stubborn street fighting in Russkaya Polyana, where the enemy succeeded in holding up further advances. However, the enemy was beaten out of these and other populated points with heavy losses thanks to the active assistance of the airborne troops.

The airborne brigade fought fierce battles on this position for four days against enemy reserves moving up from the direction of Smely. This helped troops of Second Ukrainian Front in successfully completing the encirclement and destruction of the enemy in Cherkassy.

The Brigade's subsequent combat operations to expand the captured base of operations went on until 28 November in close coordination with units of 254th and 294th rifle divisions. On 28 November 1943 the airborne brigade was relieved and taken out of combat for evacuation to the rear.

* * *

The utilization of an airborne landing in the offensive operation of Voronezh Front in September 1943 with the goal of seizing a base of operations on the Dnieper was in answer to the operational situation then in being. At the same time, serious defects were permitted in the organization and conduct of the airborne operation. Above all, this was the lack of systematic reconnaissance of the drop zone and the shifts of enemy troops and reserves, as a result of which the command and staffs used obsolete information in making a decision on combat employment of the landing force. There was no suitable navigational support of the flights to the drop zone. Radio communications with the landing force were at first poorly arranged. The paratroopers were scattered out over a large area. In this regard, the command of Airborne Forces deserved a reprimand, since it did not draw the appropriate conclusions from the experience of the 4th Airborne Corps, which landed in the winter of 1942.

The paratroopers turned out to be in exceptionally difficult circumstances in connection with the improper estimate of the situation on the right bank of the Dnieper, especially in the Bukrin bend, and of the combat capabilities of Front troops to force the river and develop the offensive from the base of operations.

Twice after the landing was made, the Front shock grouping massed in the Bukrin base of operations tried to go on the offensive, and both times was unsuccessful. This was because the operation was prepared in extremely limited time periods, and the small size of the base of operations hindered the massing of the required number of men and combat equipment. An insufficient density of artillery and a lack of ammunition sharply reduced the force of the blow of attacking troops. Moreover, after the Hitlerites withdrew behind the Dnieper, they massed five Panzer and five infantry divisions in a relatively narrow sector opposite the Bukrin base of operations and set up a firm defense which covered the exits from the Bukrin bend to the west.

In spite of the failure, operations from the Bukrin base of operations played a large part in creating favorable conditions for attack with the goal of liberating Kiev at the beginning of November 1943.

The difficult situation on the Bukrin base of operations could not help but be reflected in the entire course and outcome of the airborne operation, and placed the paratroopers in unbelievably difficult conditions.

Even though they were in no condition to accomplish the assigned tasks before taking off for the landing, the paratroopers by their bold actions in the enemy rear drew off on themselves considerable Hitlerite forces and indirectly aided the attacking troops in forcing the Dnieper, especially in the vicinity of Cherkassy.

Here is what Pravda then wrote about the actions of our troops on the Dnieper:

"The Cherkassy Operation is one of the most interesting battles which has taken place on the Dnieper in 1943.

...Three main forces worked closely together and were harmoniously combined on the battlefield in this operation, which is comparatively small in scale. These forces were the units of the Red Army with all their mighty technology, which delivered the main blow; partisan detachments fighting from the forests and making raids on lines of communication of the enemy Cherkassy grouping; and paratroop units skillfully dropped behind the backs of the German defenders, who aided the offensive from the rear and disorganized the German defenses."¹

During the entire period that the paratroopers operated on the right bank of the Dnieper, they destroyed over 4,000 Hitlerite soldiers and officers.

¹Pravda, 30 November 1943.

and captured or destroyed a large amount of enemy equipment, depots, railroad cars, locomotives, etc. In addition, the guard of a concentration camp was destroyed and around 500 prisoners were liberated. The lives of many hundreds of women, old men, and children hiding from the invaders in the forests were saved.

The combat log of Airborne Forces sums up this operation as follows: "...officers and men fought heroically, honorably justifying in battle the title of Guards. By order of the Commander of the Second Ukrainian Front, all personnel are thanked for accomplishing their combat mission."

The high title of Hero of the Soviet Union was awarded to the Commander of 5th Airborne Brigade, Lt Col P. M. Sidorchuk, the Commander of one of the battalions, Maj Bluvshcheyn, and other officers and men for the battles in the Bukrin base of operations and at Cherkassy. Over a thousand paratroopers were awarded orders and medals.

In spite of his considerable superiority in men and material, the enemy was not able to destroy the Soviet airborne landing force dropped in the immediate rear of the forces defending the right bank of the Dnieper in the vicinity of Kanev.

Note:

p. 175 (p. 171 of Russ text) - page nr. in footnote is illegible.

p. 179 (pp. 194-196)

The names of personnel liberated are transliterated where I was not sure of spelling. Уагн Теробур, Блупер, Опзук, Аоип Брэдн.

The following placenames in Hungary could not be checked:

p. 194 (214) Zamey, Banhida

p. 196 (217) Lake Velejte, Sherkarostek, Chor, Sin'ye

p. 197 (218) Mocha Station, Berkida

p. 201 (223) Zarez, Elting, Kshuvor

ON THE BLACK SEA AND IN THE FAR EAST

On the eve of the Great Patriotic War parachute landing companies were formed from marine and naval aviation personnel of the Baltic and Black Sea fleets. However these companies had not yet taken a course of specialized training because there were difficulties in getting parachute equipment and air transports. As soon as the war began, personnel of these companies were sent to other units. At the same time, sailor parachutists of the Black Sea Fleet accomplished repeated combat missions in the enemy rear.

Odessa

At the end of August 1941 Hitlerite troops in fierce fighting pressed units of the Odessa Defensive Region in the eastern sector. The city, port, and ships following the channel were in the zone of fire of enemy artillery. The battle against enemy batteries using aviation and the fire of shipboard and field artillery was without results.

To improve the situation in the eastern sector of the Odessa Defensive Region it was necessary above all else to suppress the enemy artillery and then restore the previous position.

The command directing the defense of Odessa worked out a plan for conducting a joint operation by units of the Odessa Defensive Region and warships of the Black Sea Fleet. The plan of operations provided that during the day of the 21st and the night of the 21/22nd of September Fleet aviation would neutralize enemy aviation and close reserves by strikes against airfields and troop concentrations in the eastern sector of defense.

The 3rd Naval Infantry Regiment was to land on the night of 21/22 September under covering fire of shipboard artillery in the area of Adzhalyk Inlet near the village of Grigor'yevka. Then at daybreak the sailors were to take Chebanka, Staraya Dofinovka, and Novaya Dofinovka and dig in along this line, thus assisting the attack of the group of forces of the Odessa Defensive Region in the direction of Sverdlovo.

At the same time, on the same night, the plan called for a group of 23 sailor parachutists to be dropped from a TB-3 aircraft for diversionary operations in the vicinity of the town of Shitsli.

Thus it was planned to inflict a combined blow upon the enemy: from the front by the ground troops, and from the rear by the naval and airborne landing forces, supported by shipboard artillery.

The airborne landing force was dropped on the night of 21/22 September 30 minutes before the naval landing party was landed and while the drop zone was being fired on by warships of the Black Sea Fleet.

The parachutists immediately began active operations to disrupt communications and to create panic in the enemy rear. A dark, moonless night helped conceal the drop and sow panic in the enemy rear, but at the same time it hindered the assembly and activities of parachutists on a full scale.

However during preparations for the landing, a variation of independent actions by groups varying in strength was worked out. Therefore, although the parachutists were somewhat scattered, they lost no time in moving to the assembly point, but immediately began accomplishing the combat mission in the vicinity of the nearest objective. They did this by orienting themselves on the terrain and by knowing all the objectives in the area.

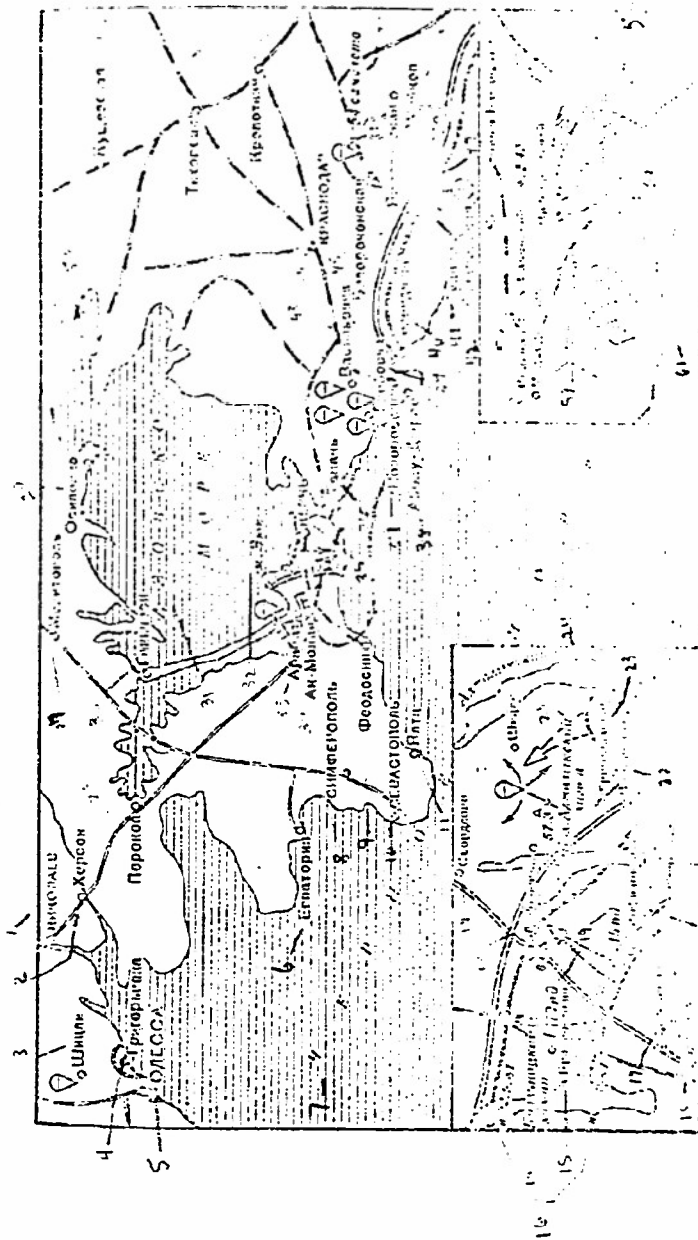
In the book Morskaya dusha (Spirit of the Sea) by Leonid Sobolev, which is probably familiar to the reader, there is a true tale of the "Battalion of four." This tells of a quartet of sailor parachutists -- Vyacheslav Bogdanov, Grigoriy Yeliseyev, Mikhail Negreb, and Petr Korolev -- who took part in the parachute landing in Grigor'yevka and operated in the enemy rear in place of an entire battalion.

With their initiative and bold actions, the parachutists destroyed several lines of wire communications, one command post, and a number of other objectives. This had considerable effect on, and delayed the movement of enemy reserves against the naval landing force. Due to the lack of organized resistance from the shore, the landing proceeded almost without losses and its operations ashore were successful.

Further advance by the naval landing force was checked only by the resistance of separate, scattered enemy units. According to prisoners, the command of 15th Romanian Division was not able to clarify the situation the entire night, since communications had been disrupted among units and with adjacent elements. Information which did come in was so contradictory that it was not clear as to where the Soviet units were attacking: from the sea, from the air, or from the direction of Odessa. And the main information was also lacking, i.e. what was their strength?

On the morning of 22 September the parachutists linked up with the sailors in the landing force, and by the end of the day both forces had carried out the assigned mission. On 23 September they linked up with oncoming

NOT REPRODUCIBLE



Airborne landings on the Black Sea Coast

KEY: 1. Nikolayev; 2. Kherson; 3. Shitsli; 4. Grigor'yevka; 5. Odessa; 6. Yevpatoriya; 7. Black Sea; 8. Simferopol'; 9. Feodosiya; 10. Sevastopol'; 11. Yalta; 12. Sverdlovo; 13. Staraya Dofinovka; 14. Kiyal'-nitskiy Inlet; 15. Krasnoselka; 16. as of; 17. Kryzhanovka; 18. Odessa; 19. Infantry division; 20. Novaya Dofinovka; 21. Fontanka; 22. Chebinka; 23. Grigor'yevka; 24. Adzhalytskiy Inlet; 25. Bol'shoy Adzhalytskiy Inlet; 26. Shitsli; 27. Melitopol'; 28. Perekop; 29. Osipenko; 30. Genicheski; 31. Sea of Azov; 32. Cape Zyuk; 33. Arabat; 34. Ak-Monay; 35. Kerch'; 36. Taman'; 37. Novorossiysk; [continued on next page]

38. Abrau-Dyurso; 39. Glebovka; 40. Gelendzhik; 41. Tuapse; 42. Lazarevskaya; 43. Vasil'yevka; 44. Krasnodar; 45. Belorechenskaya; 46. Yaroslavskaya; 47. Dakhovskaya; 48. Maykop; 49. 54 aircraft; 50. Kropotkin; 51. Tikhoretsk; 52. Kushchevskaya; 53. Yeysk; 54. Army; 55. Nizhnyaya Bakanskaya; 56. Krasno-Medvedovskaya; 57. Verkhniy Bakanskiy; 58. Mefodiyevskiy; 59. 10th Inf Div; 60. Gayduk; 61. Yuzhnaya Ozereyka; 62. Stanichka; 63. Novorossiysk.

units of the eastern sector of the Odessa Defensive Region. Thus the commander's concept was successfully accomplished. The naval and airborne landing forces landed by ships and planes of the Black Sea Fleet in the vicinity of Grigor'yevka struck a blow against the German-Romanian troops from the rear. At this same time, units of the Odessa garrison attacked from the front. The Romanian troops retreated 5-8 kilometers to the northeast with heavy losses. The artillery which had been firing on Odessa came into the hands of Soviet forces. In these battles the Hitlerites lost around 2,000 men killed and taken prisoner. Our troops captured 50 guns and mortars and much other equipment, including a four-gun long range battery. The Odessa base of operations was expanded so greatly that warships and vessels of the Fleet could freely exit the port without fearing artillery fire.

In this manner even a small airborne landing force aided in the success of landing a naval force and in accomplishing the assigned mission.

The drop zone for the parachutists was chosen quite well -- in the center of intersection of lines of communication and routes of movement of the enemy reserves nearest to the sector where the naval force was landed. This allowed the paratroopers immediately after landing to begin carrying out their mission without excess movements.

Dropping the parachutists 30 minutes before the naval force was landed drew the enemy's attention to the airborne landing force and disrupted troop control. The dark night and the parachutists' actions in several regions simultaneously created in the enemy's mind an exaggerated impression of the strength of the airborne force.

In his book Osazhdennaya Odessa (Odessa Besieged), Vice-Adm I. Azarov, former member of the Military Council of the Odessa Defensive Region, tells about the heroic defense of Odessa and speaks very warmly about the sailor parachutists who took part in the combined landing on 22 September 1941 in the vicinity of Grigor'yevka. The author mentions some of them as having especially distinguished themselves in battle. These included Fedor Voronkov, Pavel Litovchenko, Aleksey Kotkov, Roman Perepelitsa, Aleksandr Leont'yev, Mikhail Negreba, Vasilii Chumichev, Mikhail Baklanov, Vyacheslav Bogdanov, Grigoriy Yeliseyev, and Petr Korolev.¹

¹See Azarov, Osazhdennaya Odessa, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1966, pp. 167-171.

In the Crimea on the Ak-Monay Positions

In the middle of November 1941 the fascist German troops seized the Kerch' Peninsula, but they were halted in the Crimea at the main base of the Black Sea Fleet -- Sevastopol', along a fortified line 15-20 kilometers from the city.

Throughout the second half of November and the first half of December our forces, in coordination with the Black Sea Fleet, defended the approaches to the city. They repulsed attacks by the enemy, who applied all efforts in trying to smash the Sevastopol' grouping of our forces and take Sevastopol'.

In accordance with instructions of the GHQ of the Supreme Command, on 13 December 1941 the Transcaucasian Front command decided to conduct an operation which was given the name Kerch'-Feodosiya Landing Operation. This was the first sizeable naval landing operation of the Great Patriotic War.

The main goal of the operation was to take the Kerch' Peninsula and create conditions for liberating all of the Crimea from the fascist invaders. In addition, the Soviet troops were to strike against the enemy Kerch' grouping and draw his forces away from Sevastopol', thus easing the situation of the city's defenders, and then fully lift the blockade of Sevastopol'.

Troops of Fifty-First and Forty-Fourth armies of the Transcaucasian Front were to be landed on the Kerch' Peninsula.

It was planned to make the landing simultaneously in several points on the northern, eastern, and southern shore of the Kerch' Peninsula.

It was decided to drop a parachute company near the station of Bagerovo, west of Kerch'. It was to seize a base of operations and support the landing of the naval force at Cape Zyuk. Another parachute force from units of the 2nd Airborne Corps was readied to capture the airfield near Vladislavovka, which was to be used for basing aviation of the Transcaucasian Front. After landing in the enemy rear, the airborne force was to be operationally subordinated to the Commander of Forty-Fourth Army.

However, in the course of the landing operation the decision to drop an airborne force was changed, since warships with the naval landing force were delayed in the Sea of Azov due to serious ice conditions and were late in landing the force near Ak-Monay. Therefore the airborne force was given a new mission -- to interdict the Arabat spit in the narrowest place and prevent the enemy from approaching from the direction of Genichesk or withdrawing along the spit to the northwest.

The airborne landing force in battalion strength under the command of Maj Nyashin was massed on the Krasnodar Airfield in full readiness to land by parachute.

Eight days before the beginning of the operation, small groups of scouts were dropped into the enemy rear. These were naval parachutists with radios,

who transmitted much important intelligence about the units on the Kerch Peninsula.

On 31 December 1941 heavy TB-3 airships took off under exceptionally poor conditions and, having formed on their combat course, immediately disappeared in the clouds. It was impossible to have the aircraft fly in column in the clouds, so they took off one after another with a small time interval, i.e. they had a combat formation of a stream of single aircraft. The weather got even worse during the flight, with the clouds getting thicker and thicker and lower and lower. On the approach to the drop zone, the clouds forced the aircraft toward the ground -- the needles of the altimeters showed only 75 meters. The navigator of the aircraft in which Maj Nyashin, the commander of the airborne battalion, was flying, wrote to the Major on a sheet of his field notebook that he intended to return, since there was not even minimal altitude for a drop.

The navigator was, of course, correct. The altitude would not ensure a safe parachute opening, as the commander of the landing force also knew. But they had to jump, not return home, when the parachutists from the first aircraft were already on the ground. Maj Nyashin immediately decided to climb before approaching the target and jump from the clouds.

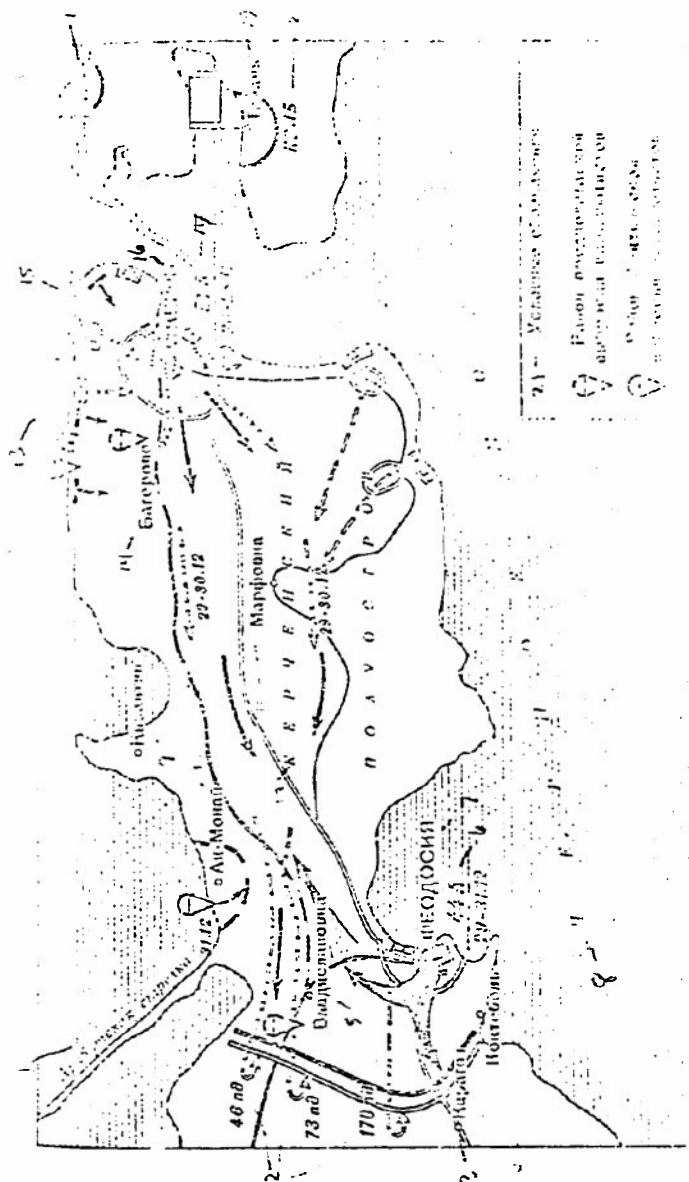
The aircraft penetrated the first layer of clouds and climbed to 450 meters as they approached the target. The ground flashed for an instant through breaks in the clouds. This was enough to be sure of the correctness of the run over the target and to give the command to jump.

Fighting was already going on on the ground. The first parachutists to land were under fire from enemy submachine gunners accompanying a large convoy of ammunition heading for Kerch'. The parachutists maneuvered their parachutes in the air and increased their speed of descent, thus decreasing their losses from enemy fire. At the same time, it was a very difficult landing: the parachutists received injuries from the heavy wind on the ground, which had frequent gusts of up to 8-10 meters per second, and for a time they became helpless as their parachutes dragged them over the ground.

The difficult conditions for landing led to a certain scattering of parachutists and considerably hindered their assembly on the ground. But the scattering of the groups of paratroopers and their bold actions over a considerable area disoriented the enemy as to the strength of the force and created the impression that a major landing force had invaded the Crimea.

Our paratroopers were forced to enter into combat with superior enemy forces right from the air. The participants of this operation will long remember the exploit of Sgt Kubarev, who was wounded while still in the air and while descending, managed to throw a grenade down into a group of enemy soldiers. After landing he immediately opened fire from his submachine gun, but the Hitlerites scattered on the field and began to go around the paratrooper, keeping him under fire. When they rushed him and tried to capture him alive, Kubarev set off two grenades, killing them and himself.

NOT REPRODUCIBLE



KEY: 1. Arabat Spit; 2. Infantry division; 3. Karagoz; 4. Koktebel'; 5. Vladislavovka; 6. Army; 7. Feodosiya; 8. Black Sea; 9. Kazantın; 10. Ak-Monay; 11. Marfovka; 12. Kerch' Peninsula; 13. Cape Zyuk; 14. Bagerovo; 15. Ossoviny; 16. Kerch'; 17. Army; 18. Kuchugury; 19. Taman'; 20. Crimean Naval Base; 21. Conventional signs: proposed drop zone; actual drop zone.

The parachutists by-passed enemy ambushes and strove in groups and moved to Ak-Monay. When the main body of the force entered, the paratroopers moved into the attack. In a brief but completely annihilated an enemy garrison and captured the first an artillery battery which had been covering the Ak-Monay northern flank. Early on New Year's Day the airborne force completed its mission and had taken up a defense of the Arabat Spit.

Units of the naval force landed in the vicinity of Kerch fought stubborn battles against counterattacking enemy troops. On 31 December, after stubborn fighting, troops of Forty-Four Division moved forward 10-15 kilometers and took the ground around Vladislav unable to move further, and so did not accomplish the encirclement of enemy Kerch' grouping.

The commander of the airborne force did not wait until the enemy went from Kerch' along the Arabat Spit to Genichesk, he divided his men into diversionary and reconnaissance groups and sent them along the roads against retreating enemy columns and convoys to destroy his headquarters and control elements. This decision was decisive since the enemy did not head for Genichesk at all.

After a time the paratroopers were replaced by a reinforced naval force, then were withdrawn from combat and shifted to the rear.

It should be noted that the refusal of the Front Command to use the force for the capture of the airfield near Vladislavovka, and the fighters there, had a negative effect on the course of the operation. It was impossible to organize effective cover for the naval force in the vicinity of Feodosiya due to the low altitude of the planes had to fly.

The Attack on an Airfield

Throughout October 1942 the enemy developed his offensive in the northern Caucasus, trying to penetrate to the Black Sea coast in Tuapse, Gagra, and Sukhumi. In this regard there was a sharp increase in enemy air activity on the Tuapse Axis. The aircraft struck the rear areas, fields, and naval lines of communications.

The enemy aircraft operating on the Tuapse Axis were based at Maykop Airfield, on which there were from 30 to 50 aircraft. The airfield had a rather strong cover of air defense, anti-aircraft machine guns, and searchlights.

In order to weaken the enemy air grouping, the decision was made to drop a diversionary airborne force on Maykop Airfield. The force consisted of a parachute unit of the Naval Air Force and would have the task of destroying enemy fighters based there.

This difficult and very dangerous mission was assigned to specially picked volunteer parachutists. The parachute detachment included two partisan guides who, after the mission had been accomplished, were to lead the detachment into the area east of Maykop, where the partisans were based.

The detachment consisted of 40 men, broken down into diversionary, cover, and control groups. The diversionary and cover groups in their turn were broken into combat squads headed either by an officer or a sergeant.

A bomber group was made available to support the operations of the parachute detachment. Its mission was to neutralize the air defense and the airfield's ground defenses before the drop; to set up a colored check point to ensure accuracy of the transports' run over the airfield; for 40 minutes after the drop, solitary crews were to continuously bomb the airfield area to prevent the movement of enemy troops from the city; to draw the anti-aircraft artillery fire off on itself and attract the searchlights; and finally, to cover the detachment's withdrawal after the mission had been accomplished.

In addition, the bomber group was to neutralize the enemy searchlights illuminating our planes and the descending parachutists during the period when the transports approached the drop zone and during the jump. Aerial reconnaissance was given the mission of determining the number and types of aircraft based at Maykop, the placement of the planes, and the organization of enemy air defense and ground defenses.

The following plan of action by the detachment was outlined.

After landing, the control group would gather in the center of the airfield, from which the commander would control the actions of the other groups, retargeting them from one objective to another with the aid of pre-arranged signals. The cover, or screening, group would destroy the airfield guard and take up the defense on the axis of probable approach of the enemy. After landing, the diversionary group, like the cover group, would not assemble, but each parachutist would independently go to the given sector where aircraft were parked to destroy them.

A set of weapons and equipment was determined for the detachment parachutists, depending on the mission they were to fulfill. Each man of the diversionary group had a submachine gun, two drums of cartridges and, in addition, three incendiary devices, two Molotov cocktails, five grenades, an all-purpose hatchet, dagger, compass, lantern, and two-days rations.

The cover group had two light machine guns and the gunners were armed also with a Tokarev pistol. This group's personnel had no special incendiary devices.

Assembly and withdrawal after accomplishment of the mission began at the signal of the detachment commander or his deputy. It was to be executed simultaneously by all groups, except for the cover group.

After the diversionary group withdrew from the airfield, the cover group was to begin withdrawing to link up with the main body of the detachment. Later the partisan guides would lead the detachment into the area where the partisans were based.

If the airborne troopers did not succeed in moving into this area, a drop zone was determined for ammunition and rations. The zone would be designated by prearranged signals laid out by the paratroopers.

A limited circle of persons were familiarized with the plan of combat activities by the airborne detachment while it was being prepared for the mission. Landing force personnel (pilots and parachutists) were familiarized with the plan and the specific missions four hours before take-off.

Detachment personnel had a good knowledge of their own weapons and also the main types of German infantry weapons. In addition, the paratroopers studied sketches and photographs of the locations of fuel tanks in Me-109 and Ju-88 aircraft, and also worked out techniques of employing incendiary devices.

Twenty days before the landing the staff of the Black Sea Fleet Air Force began to keep a chart of the daily changes in basing of enemy aircraft on Maykop airfield on the basis of aerial reconnaissance. In addition, contact was made with Maykop partisan detachments, into whose area the parachutists were to go after fulfilling the mission.

The airborne detachment was trained very thoroughly. Begun in the rudiments, the training ended with a tactical exercise involving parachute jumps both day and night.

All detachment personnel on the eve of take-off were familiarized with the last photographs of the parking areas of the aircraft as obtained from aerial reconnaissance.

The landing was made on the night of 24 October 1942. The Hitlerites immediately detected the jump and began to illuminate the parachutists with searchlights and to fire upon them with antiaircraft machine guns. The enemy antiaircraft weapons also fired upon the bombers, which at this time were striking the area of the railroad station and the roads leading into the city.

About half of the men landed right on the airfield, and a portion of them landed to the west, on its edge.

In 10-15 minutes after the parachutists landed, motorcyclists and vehicles carrying enemy soldiers began maneuvering along the roads of the airfield. The enemy exerted especially strong resistance in the area of the aircraft parking places, due to forces which moved in. One hour after the landing, the signal was given for the detachment to withdraw from the field.

In spite of heavy enemy fire, both during the landing and during the detachment's combat actions, the men destroyed 22 and damaged up to 20 aircraft of the 54 located on the Maykop field.

From Sea and Air

Throughout January 1943 troops of the Transcaucasian Front pursued enemy forces retreating from the Northern Caucasus in the direction of Rostov and onto the Taman' Peninsula. To accelerate the liberation of Novorossiysk and the Taman' Peninsula, it was decided to conduct a major landing operation. The Black Sea Fleet received the mission of preparing and landing naval forces on the night of 3/4 February: the main force in the vicinity of Yuzhnaya Ozereyka and an auxiliary force near Stanichka. These forces were to coordinate with Forty-Seventh Army in destroying the enemy Novorossiysk grouping and in taking the city and port of Novorossiysk. It was planned to land both forces simultaneously. Their actions ashore would be supported by shipboard artillery of the screening detachment and by aviation.

Simultaneously, for diversionary actions and for disrupting control in the vicinity of Vasil'yevka and Glebovka, an airborne force was to be dropped with the mission of destroying the Headquarters of 10th Infantry Division in Vasil'yevka, disrupting troop control, blowing up a bridge, delaying the move of enemy reserves to the site of the naval landing, and preventing the withdrawal of enemy units from the vicinity of Yuzhnaya Ozereyka.

An airborne detachment of 80 men was formed for the mission. It consisted of four combat groups.

An air transport detachment of PS-84 aircraft was made available for the landing. In addition, a group of bombers and fighters was designated to support the airborne landing and subsequent ground operations.

The airborne force was to take off from one of the airfields in the Caucasus, where, for the two days prior to the drop, transport aircraft were massed.

In accordance with the plan, the force was to be dropped around 0100 hours on 4 February 1943, 45 minutes before the beginning of artillery preparatory fire against the landing area of the naval force. The air drop was planned in four points near Glebovka and Vasil'yevka. Two minutes before the drop, bombers were to set fire to these populated points.

At the same time as the parachutists were dropped, it was planned to have Fleet bombers strike Yuzhnaya Ozereyka, set it afire, and thus create a lighted check point for the warships with the naval landing force.

In case the naval landing near Yuzhnaya Ozereyka was unsuccessful, the parachutists were to withdraw in small groups to the vicinity of the Abrau-Dyurso Sovkhoz by the end of the third day of the operation.

The air drop was made according to plan, with only one plane returning to base without fulfilling the mission due to a loss of orientation. After landing, all groups of paratroopers operated independently.

The men attacked Vasil'yevka and destroyed the garrison, but there was no infantry division headquarters here.

In three days of operations in the enemy rear the men killed around 110 enemy officers and men, disrupted communications in a number of places, and destroyed several firing positions.

The naval landing in the vicinity of Yuzhnaya Ozereyka was unsuccessful due to a delay in arrival of the warships and heavy enemy fire.

The naval force was landed successfully in the vicinity of Stanichka and dug in in spite of repeated enemy counterattacks. The Soviet command immediately began to build up forces on the base of operations and fortify it. This base, which was called "Little Homeland," existed for seven months and played an important role in the liberation of Novorossiysk.

On 5 February a separate airborne regiment formed from personnel of the former 2nd Airborne Corps was moved to the "Little Homeland" together with the sailors.

The small airborne landing force could not provide substantial assistance in the landing of the naval force near Yuzhnaya Ozereyka, but was able to pin a large part of the enemy forces down in this area, which indirectly aided the landing of the naval force at Stanichka.

And in the Pacific...

The finale of World War II, which was unleashed by fascist Germany and imperialist Japan, came at the end of August 1945 in the Far East.

By smashing the Kwantung Army -- the very strong grouping of Japanese ground forces -- in a short period of time, the Armed Forces of the Soviet Union very decisively hastened Japan's capitulation before the allied powers.

Ships and planes of the Pacific Fleet and Red-Banner Amur Flotilla acted in close coordination with ground forces in the Far Eastern campaign. Here military transport aviation was probably utilized to the fullest in comparison to operations of the Great Patriotic War, along with other air arms. The landing of airborne forces was a frequent phenomenon in the concluding stage of combat operations in the Far East.

The actions by airborne forces in the Far East were highly praised. "The airborne forces landed in the period from 16 through 27 August played an important part in successfully accomplishing their assigned missions. This experience in quickly deciding unexpected missions in the enemy's deep rear preserves its completely current importance. The main thing here is swiftness of organization and timeliness in landing the forces."¹

¹Final (The Finale). Historical memoirs edited by Mar SU R. Ya. Malinovsky, Moscow, Nauka Publishing House, 1966, p. 331.

It became necessary to utilize airborne landing forces in the concluding phase of our offensive operations, when the enemy resistance had basically been broken. Important missions had to be accomplished -- quick seizure of strategic points and industrial and military objectives in the deep rear of the Japanese forces to prevent destruction of material values and to ensure disarmament of Japanese garrisons. This mission could not be accomplished with the requisite speed even by mobile advance detachments of a tank army and mechanized corps.

Under these circumstances the command of the Transbaikal and First Far Eastern fronts more than once resorted to use of airborne landing forces. These forces did not include specially trained airborne units, but were made up of ground force personnel.

The strength of airborne landing forces which landed in central Manchurian cities, on the Liaotung Peninsula, and in Northern Korea was from 200 to 500 men, while those on South Sakhalin and the Kuriles numbered from 35 to 130 men.

All these forces were airlanded in Li-2 transports, which belonged to the 21st Guards and 54th air transport divisions.

Combat aviation of air armies and the Pacific Fleet Air Force was used to reconnoiter the airfields where the landings would take place, to cover the airborne forces during their flight, to neutralize possible enemy resistance in the vicinity of captured airfields, and to cover the landing of the airborne forces. The transports carrying the airborne troops would go in for a landing right after the attacks by ground attack and fighter aircraft.

Take-off of airborne landing forces in the Transbaikal Front was from Tupliao Airfield to the north of Mukden, which had been captured by our troops earlier. Over 600 motorized riflemen of the Sixth Guards Tank Army had been massed on this airfield. Airlanding of forces from the First Far Eastern Front was made by units of 54th Air Transport Division.

A total of around 20 landing forces were put down. Here are just a few examples.

By decision of the Commander of First Far Eastern Front, Mar SU K. A. Meretskoy, an airborne force of 120 men was landed on Harbin Airfield on 18 August under the command of Lt Col M. S. Zabelin. The force was made up of men of the 20th Combat Engineer Motorized Assault Brigade. All men were broken into combat groups with specific missions.

A special representative of the Military Council, Deputy Chief of Staff of the Front Maj Gen G. A. Shelakhov, took off with the airborne force. He was to present to the Japanese command the conditions of surrender, seize the most important objectives with the airborne force, and prevent the destruction of bridges over the Sungari River and the demolition of depots, bases, and other objectives until our forward mobile troops arrived.

The transports with men, weapons, and ammunition had to cross the front lines and land 250 kilometers in the enemy rear. The situation was not clear: a major Japanese grouping was located in the vicinity of Harbin and it was not known how they would react to the landing. The vagueness of the situation was also aggravated by the fact that the Japanese command had not answered a radio message sent to Harbin telling of the take-off of a Soviet military representative and demanding the immediate surrender of the Harbin garrison.

At 1900 hours on 18 August the men under Lt Col M. S. Zabelin landed on the airfield and immediately began carrying out their mission. By morning of the following day they had occupied the buildings of the Japanese mission, the gendarmery, and the police headquarters. They placed a guard on bridges, power stations, the train station, banks, the telegraph, and other important objectives.

On the morning of 19 August the Chief of Staff of the Kwantung Army, Lt Gen Hata, and a group of Japanese generals and officers, all of whom had been detained by the airborne troops, were sent by Soviet transport aircraft to the command post of the First Far Eastern Front.

After the Japanese accepted the terms of surrender, Zabelin's detachment was faced with complex and responsible tasks both in disarming the large enemy Harbin garrison and in setting up commandant's service in the city and its environs. Naturally, the small detachment was not able to handle such tasks, but at the same time, the arrival of Front advance detachments in the vicinity of Harbin was being delayed due to torrential rains and flooding rivers. Therefore the decision was made to reinforce the airborne troops by air.

On the day that Zabelin's detachment took off for Harbin, another detachment was readying to carry out a combat mission in Kirin.

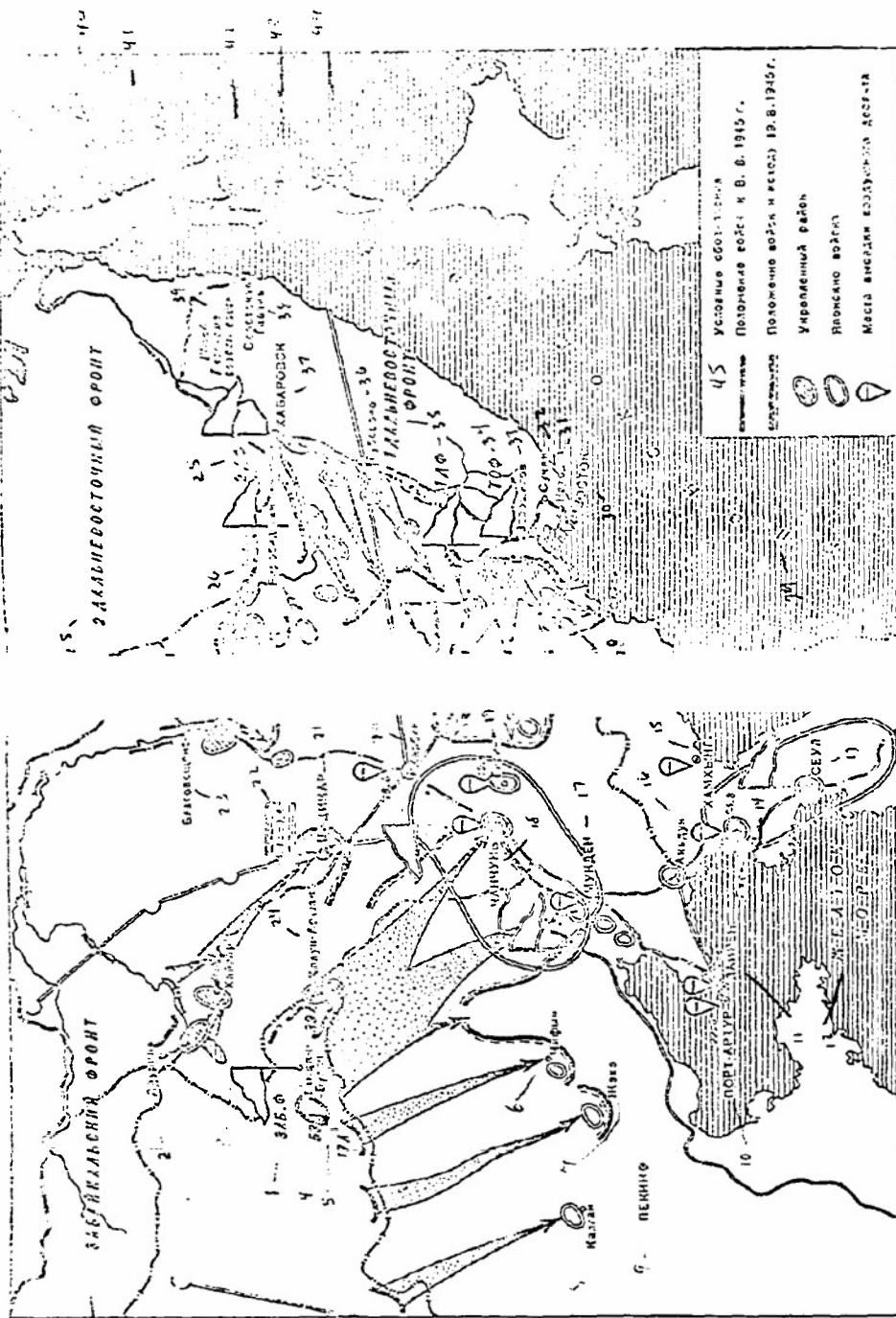
On the morning of 19 August the first plane took off with scouts, and after it the other transport aircraft took off with airborne troops under the command of an experienced parachutist, Lt Col Krutskikh, who had taken off for the enemy rear more than once during the Great Patriotic War. A Front representative, Col Lebedev, flew with them.

Here was Kirin. The aircraft motors had not been switched off yet as the airborne troops emerged and immediately took up a defense on the airfield. More and more aircraft continued to land.

Without awaiting for the surrender talks to end, the airborne force seized the railroad station, the telegraph and post offices, the bank, a bridge across the Sungari River, a dam, and other important objectives, the defense of which was immediately organized.

On 20 August an advance detachment of the 10th Mechanized Corps entered the city.

NOT REPRODUCIBLE



Airborne landings in the Far East [KEY on following page]

KEY: 1. Transbaikal Front; 2. Dauriya; 3. Hailar; 4. Tamtsak-Bulak; 5. Army; 6. Chihfeng; 7. Jehol; 8. Kalgan; 9. Peking; 10. Port Arthur; 11. Dairen; 12. Yellow Sea; 13. Seoul; 14. Pyongyang; 15. Hamhung; 16. Antung; 17. Mukden; 18. Changchun; 19. Kirin; 20. Harbin; 21. Tsitsihar; 22. Fourth Separate Army; 23. Blagoveshchensk; 24. Halun-Arshan; 25. Second Far Eastern Front; 26. Lazarevo; 27. Birobidzhan; 28. Seishin; 29. Sea of Japan; 30. Vladivostok; 31. Nakhodka; 32. Suchan; 33. Voroshilov; 34. Pacific Front; 35. First Far Eastern Front; 36. Gubero; 37. Khabarovsk; 38. Sovetskaya Gavan'; 39. HQ of High Command of Soviet Forces; 40. Sea of Okhotsk; 41. Sakhalin Island; 42. Sayro; 43. 88th Inf Div; 44. Toyohara; 45. Conventional signs: situation as of 8. 8. 1945; situation by the end of 19. 8. 1945; fortified area; Japanese forces; landing zones of airborne forces.

On 19 August airborne forces were airlanded by the Transbaikal Front, specifically in Changchun and Mukden.

"The airborne troops of the Transbaikal Front played an important role in taking Mukden. This was a very bold decision to land our troops in the deep rear of the Japanese Army, which was smashed and had surrendered, but which still continued to offer resistance to advancing Soviet units on some sectors of the front."²

Making up the airborne force were 225 picked soldiers of the Sixth Guards Tank Army, who had taken part in many battles of the Great Patriotic War. They were led by a representative of the Military Council, Chief of the Political Section of the Transbaikal Front HQ, Maj Gen A. D. Pritula.

At 1300 hours on 19 August a group of Soviet transports accompanied by fighters landed on the Mukden airfield. Defense of the airfield was immediately organized in case of possible counterattacks on the part of the Japanese. The men were lucky: right on the field they captured the not unknown Manchurian Emperor Ho P'u Yi. He was planning to fly to Japan and was awaiting an aircraft which was being readied especially for him. But in its place on the Mukden airfield landed the Soviet airborne troops, who took him prisoner along with his suite. Soon the Emperor was testifying on Soviet soil.

According to the Japanese, the airborne force swooped down on them like snow. They had not expected the appearance of Soviet troops at all. Documents were laid out on desks in the airfield offices...

On the same day our airborne troops liberated a large number of allied servicemen -- Americans and British -- from a Japanese prison camp. The entire Japanese guard was disarmed and until the approach of Front troops the control of the camp was placed in the hands of a group of American and British generals, among whom were British Air Vice Marshal Maltby, generals Jones and Sharp Chenovich,¹ who were American Corps commanders, and generals Vtofer,¹ Pierce, Fonk, Oreik,¹ Stevens, and Loif Beybi,¹ who were division commanders. The

¹Transliterated from the Russian.

²Final, p. 285.

senior man in rank and age in the Mukden camp was the American General Parker, who was appointed camp commandant.

On 22 August Soviet airborne troops under the command of Deputy Commander of Transbaikalian Front Lt Gen V. D. Ivanov landed in legendary Port Arthur.

The men were very excited, for they had been given the honor of being first into the city of combat glory of the Russian Army -- Port Arthur, where Russian soldiers had fought bravely against Japanese invaders in 1904-1905.

The Front Military Council gave Gen V. D. Ivanov the task of conducting talks on surrender and disarmament of the Japanese ground and naval units in the Port Arthur garrison. While the talks were going on, the troops were to seize all important objectives of the city and port.

The situation was urgent, since our ground forces were still far from Port Arthur. By instructions of the Commander of the Transbaikalian Front, Major R. Ya. Malinovskiy, 200 men of the Sixth Guards Tank Army were included in the airborne force. The detachment was commanded by Major I. I. Beloded.

The Twelfth Air Army moved the troops and covered the transports in the air and while landing on the enemy airfield.

When the airborne force approached the airfield, Japanese fighters several times tried to approach our transports, but moved off after catching sight of the powerful air cover.

When the planes were coming in for a landing, Japanese soldiers tried to fire on them. Our fighters came in low and swept the airfield with fire, and the Japanese scattered.

The airborne troops immediately disarmed several garrison subunits in the vicinity, taking prisoner around 200 Japanese soldiers and marines. A part of the airborne troops hurried in automobiles and trucks into the western part of the city, where large garrison forces were situated. At the same time, they sought out the head of the garrison, Vice-Admiral Kaboyasi.

At this very same time, another unit of airborne troops was occupying the telegraph and telephone offices, train station, and port, on the inner anchorage of which stood Japanese warships. They disarmed the port guard and others.

On 23 August a tank brigade of Sixth Guards Tank Army arrived in Port Arthur. On 25 August sailors were moved in by air before the arrival of our warships. They quickly brought order in the port. Not one Japanese warship moved out of the harbor.

Successful airborne landings were made in other Manchurian and Korean cities. On 24 August airborne groups and detachments were landed in the city

of Pyongyang -- a major industrial and trade center in Korea -- and occupied the city.

On this same day, in spite of difficult weather conditions, the airborne troops also landed in the Korean city of Kanko, a provincial center and a junction for railroads and highways.

Airborne forces of varying sizes were used no less successfully in the cities of South Sakhalin and in the Kuriles. On 23 August three airborne forces were landed on Sakhalin, each made of up 35 picked men from airfield service battalions. The men landed on three Japanese airfields with the goal of preventing the Japanese, who had surrendered, from destroying airfield structures, aircraft, and depots. This goal was achieved.

The numerous airborne landing forces employed in the concluding phase of the war in the Far East are suggested by the fact that of 7,650 missions flown by air transports of three fronts, 20 percent were for carrying airborne landing forces. The aircraft carried a total of 17,000 men and up to 6,000 tons of various cargoes, including 2,777 tons of fuels and lubricants and 550 tons of ammunition.¹

¹Final, p. 332.

Chapter VIII

AIRBORNE TROOPS ATTACK FROM THE FRONT

The history of Soviet airborne forces in the Great Patriotic War is not so much a history of their employment as airborne landing forces, as a history of operations by parachutists chiefly in the ranks of Guards infantry when the circumstances of the war demanded this. It must be noted that operations as part of the ground forces are characteristic of airborne troops of other armies which took part in World War II -- Germany, the United States, and England.

Soviet airborne troops fought side by side with infantrymen and tankers, combat engineers and artillerymen, on almost all sectors of the Soviet-German Front, both as part of their own airborne large units and as Guards rifle large units reformed from airborne brigades and divisions. For example, in February and March 1942, when the airborne operation was being conducted in the Western Front, the Commander of Southwestern Front received the 1st and 2nd mobile airborne and 204th airborne brigades. In addition, the 1st Airborne Brigade was sent to the Volkhov Front.

In April 1942 the 2nd Airborne Corps (2nd, 3rd, and 4th airborne brigades) and the 3rd Airborne Corps (5th, 6th, and 212th airborne brigades), which were massed in the Northern Caucasus, were re-formed into the 32nd and 33rd Guards rifle divisions and placed at the disposal of the Commander of the North Caucasus Front. During the period from 30 July through 10 August 1942 the Transcaucasus Front received five separate mobile airborne brigades and a reserve airborne regiment, from which were formed six Guards rifle brigades. These became the 10th and 1st Guards rifle corps.

At the height of the difficult defensive battles on the Don and on the Stalingrad Axis in August 1942 the Stalingrad Front received eight Guards rifle divisions: 34th (7th Airborne Corps), 35th (8th Airborne Corps), 36th (9th Airborne Corps), 37th (1st Airborne Corps), 38th (4th Airborne Corps), 39th (5th Airborne Corps), 40th (6th Airborne Corps), and 41st (10th Airborne Corps). The latter five divisions were made part of First Guards Army.

In September 1942 eight airborne corps were again formed, in connection with the arrival of eight rifle divisions and six rifle brigades, formed from airborne units, in the army in the field. In December these corps were transferred to tables of organization of Guards airborne divisions (1st through 10th). In the period from 2 through 23 February 1943 all 10 airborne divisions were sent to the Southwestern Front by order of the GHQ of the Supreme Command.

However by the end of May 1943 20 new airborne brigades were in being. After a summer period of training, the People's Commissar of Defense ordered 18 brigades formed into six Guards airborne divisions (11th through 16th). Two brigades -- 3rd and 8th -- remained as separate large units.

In January 1944 the 37th Guards Rifle Corps was formed from troops of the Airborne Forces. It included the 98th Guards Rifle Division (18th, 19th, and 20th airborne brigades), 99th Guards Rifle Division (6th, 13th, and 15th airborne brigades), and 100th Guards Rifle Division (9th, 10th, and 12th airborne brigades). As part of Seventh Army of the Karelian Front, this Corps took part in forcing the Svir' River and in operations to liberate Soviet Karelia. In 1945, in the concluding phase of the Great Patriotic War, the Ninth Guards Army, formed from airborne troops making up three Guards rifle corps (37th, 38th, and 39th), took part in operations to liberate Hungary, Austria, and Czechoslovakia from the fascist German troops.

The Airborne Forces received new replacements in place of the airborne units and large units which left for the front. These new men were trained by experienced cadres of specialists. Airborne schools played a large part in the training of airborne troops. This included the Airborne School, advance training courses for officers, glider school, and training and reserve regiments. Large units and units of the Airborne Forces were always kept up to strength and were continually ready to carry out combat missions with or without an airborne landing. New cadres were trained in the combat experience gained by airborne troops both in the enemy rear and in front line operations.

Front line actions of airborne units and large units were characterized by the utter bravery and heroism of the troops and the supreme devotion of personnel to the Communist Party, the Soviet Government, and the socialist Motherland. As confirmation of this, one could cite numerous examples of brilliant actions by individual parachutists, subunits, units, and large units of the airborne forces in combined-arms combat.

In the Don Steppes

Here in the Don Steppes Guards airborne troops of the 33rd, 35th, and 40th Guards rifle divisions covered themselves with unfading glory.

At the end of July 1942 near the station of Kletskaya, four antitank riflemen headed by Jr Sgt Petr Boloto of the 33rd Guards Rifle Division of Col A. I. Utvenko met a fascist tank column head on. The Guardsmen had only two antitank rifles, but they boldly entered into combat against 30 enemy tanks. In one day the heroes destroyed 15 tanks and did not allow the enemy

to cross their positions. "Steadfastness Conquers Death" -- such was the Krasnaya zvezda headline of an editorial devoted to this exploit.¹

Troops of a machine gun company of 35th Guards Rifle Division (the former 8th Airborne Corps) commanded by Ruben Ruis Ibarruri, son of Chairman of the Spanish Communist Party Central Committee Dolores Ibarruri, distinguished themselves in battles for Kotluban' Station near Samofalovka. Inspired by their courageous commander, they blocked the way for fascist tanks into the Station. Ruben Ruis was mortally wounded.² He was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for bravery and valor.

On 16 August, on another sector of the Front, a platoon of airborne troops of 40th Guards Rifle Division (former 6th Airborne Corps) of First Guards Army, headed by Jr Lt V. D. Kochetkov, were ordered to take up a position on a commanding height near the farmstead of Dubovyy, not far from Sirotinskaya Station. For two days the Guardsmen beat off furious attacks by the Hitlerites. Soon only four men were left in action of the 16 brave soldiers -- M. P. Stepanenko, V. A. Chirkov, E. A. Shuktonov, and the seriously wounded V. D. Kochetkov. The ammunition came to an end. The Guardsmen fulfilled their obligation not to let the enemy pass. True to their homeland, the men threw themselves under the fascist tanks with bundles of grenades. The enemy was halted.



Col A. I. Utvenko congratulates antitank rifleman Petr Boloto on his being given the title Hero of the Soviet Union

¹See Krasnaya zvezda, 13 August 1942.

²See Velikaya Otechestvennaya voyna Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945. Kratkaya istoriya, p. 174.

A City Under Fire

In mid September 1942, trying to take Stalingrad at all cost, the Hitlerites deployed a powerful grouping for the assault on the city. This included 13 divisions (up to 170,000 men), over 500 tanks, and 3,000 guns and mortars. This grouping was supported from the air by the Fourth Air Force of over a thousand aircraft. At that time the city was being defended by two armies -- Sixty-Second and Sixty-Fourth. The enemy struck the main blow against Sixty-Second Army, which was considerably weakened from preceding battles.

In connection with the tense situation which had arisen in defense of the city, the GHQ of the Supreme Command reinforced Sixty-Second Army with fresh troops by moving to the city several large units, including Guards divisions formed from airborne troops.

By mid October the situation of the city's defenders had become even more serious. The Hitlerite command planned to deliver the main strike against the Tractor Plant.

Among the divisions of Sixty-Second Army operating on this axis was the 37th Guards Rifle Division, which had been formed from units of the 1st Airborne Corps. It was commanded by Maj Gen V. G. Zholudev. The Guards airborne troops stood here to the death. Enemy attacks did not let up day or night, but all were beaten off by the steadfast defense of the Guardsmen.

On 7 October 90 tanks supported an attack by two enemy regiments, but the enemy only succeeded in pressing our units in a few places and could not take the Tractor Plant. In spite of enormous losses, the enemy rushed toward the Volga. In just one day of fighting on 14 October, the Guards airborne troops and soldiers of adjacent units knocked out 40 tanks. On this day the Hitlerite invaders lost over 1,500 men killed alone.

However, the forces were too uneven. In the latter half of the day on 14 October up to 180 enemy tanks crossed through the combat formations of our troops and moved into the area of the North Stadium of the Tractor Plant. Individual groups of the Hitlerites succeeded in getting into the plant shops.

The courageous airborne troops of 37th Guards Rifle Division, although broken into isolated subunits and separate groups and surrounded on all sides, fought stubborn battles against enemy infantry at the old positions.

On 15 October the fighting continued with the greatest intensity. The heroism of the airborne troops, the severe situation, and the beginning of the battle are told in excerpts from the diary of the Commander of Sixty-Second Army, V. I. Churkov:

"0800 Hours. Enemy attacked with tanks and infantry, fighting going on along the entire front.

0930. Enemy attack on STZ [Stalingradskiy Traktorny zavod; Stalingrad Tractor Plant] beaten off. Ten fascist tanks burning on the plant grounds.

1000. Tanks and infantry overran 109th Guards Rifle Regiment of 37th Division.

1150. Enemy has captured STZ Stadium. Our subunits which were cut off are fighting in encirclement.

1230. Gen Zholudev's command post bombed by dive bombers. Gen Zholudev is without communications in a buried dugout. I am taking over communications with units of this Division.

1320. Air (through a pipe) has been provided to Gen Zholudev's dugout.

1600. Communications interrupted with 114th Guards Regiment of 37th Division, and its situation is unknown.

1620. Around 100 enemy tanks have broken onto the territory of the Tractor Plant. Enemy aviation, as before, hangs over our heads, bombing and strafing.

2100. One more message from a group of Guards airborne troops of 37th Division. They are continuing to fight in the vicinity of the Tractor Plant and end their report with the words: 'We will die for the Motherland, but will not surrender.'¹

And for 16 days the airborne troops withstood continuous attacks and a tornado of fire from air and ground, but not one of them even thought about retreat. The Volga was behind them, and there was no ground for the troops on the other side.

Here is what Mar SU V. I. Chuykov wrote in his book Nachalo puti (The Beginning of the Trail) many years later:

"...I cannot help but say a few words about the Guardsmen of Gen Zholudev's 37th Division, which joined us. These were really Guards. The men were all young, stalwart, strong, and many were dressed in the uniform of airborne troops, with daggers and Finnish knives in their belts. They fought heroically. When they struck the Hitlerites with bayonets, they threw them over their heads like bags of straw. They assaulted in groups. Breaking into houses and cellars, they put their daggers and knives into play. They knew no retreat, but fought when surrounded to their last man and died with songs and exclamations on their lips: 'For the Motherland! We'll not retreat or surrender!'

...In these days I also said goodbye to Gen Viktor Grigor'yevich Zholudev. His 37th Guards Division had been at Stalingrad less than all others, but its services had been no less than others.

¹Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuz 1941-1945, v. 2, p. 445.

The Hitlerites broke through Zholudev's Division and captured the Tractor Plant, but the enemy paid so dearly for this breakthrough, losing so many men and so much equipment, that he could develop the attack no further. Not one, and not two Hitlerite divisions tore through regiments of 37th Division to the Tractor Plant, but an entire five divisions, including two tank divisions.¹

The Krasnyy Oktyabr' Plant was defended by subunits of 39th Guards Division, which had also been formed from airborne troops. On 22 October the enemy began attacking the plant with forces of up to two infantry regiments supported by 15 tanks. The troops did not waver, but halted the enemy with powerful fire from all weapons and with a bold counterattack.

However, separate groups of enemy infantry succeeded in slipping onto the plant grounds in several sectors and digging in. Fierce fighting broke out among the plant buildings and in the shops. By 31 October, after heavy fighting, the airborne troops had taken the open-hearth, calibration, and sorting shops and the goods warehouse. The enemy was totally destroyed. Not one of his officers or men succeeded in escaping the blow of the airborne troops.

The enemy subsequently tried more than once to attack our positions, but to no avail.

During the battles near Stalingrad Maj Gen (Gds) S. S. Gur'yev, who commanded 39th Guards Division, wrote the Military Council of Airborne Forces: "They fought two days without a breather. The first battle which the young troopers fought showed that we have a golden people. They fought to their last cartridge, to their last breath."

One battalion of parachutists was cut off from the main body at the very beginning of battle, but the men did not forget their special training for operating in enemy rears. At night the battalion straddled the main road, an enemy line of communication, and attacked a vehicle column. In this fight alone they destroyed 30 vehicles with infantry, four staff vehicles, and three radio stations. They captured 12 artillery pieces, with which they knocked out four enemy tanks. There was terrible confusion in the enemy camp. At daybreak German aviation swooped down on the parachutists, but did not succeed in doing them any harm. The airborne troops had made timely use of signal panels captured from the Germans and laid out recognition signals, which led the German pilots into confusion. On the following night, on order of the commander, the troops reconnoitered the enemy positions, slipped through his combat formations to the Don, and crossed to the opposite bank on enemy crossing equipment, taking with them a "tongue."

Eight airborne scouts headed by Sr Lt Sergeyev displayed great steadfastness, courage, and heroism. For 15 days they defended a plant shop which

¹V. I. Chuykov, Nachalo puti, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1962, pp. 208-209.

was the last line on the way to the Volga. This small group of brave airborne troopers repulsed 10 major attacks by superior enemy forces. Our men were below in the cellar, and the Germans were above on the first floor. Once the Germans decided to break through the floor and throw grenades down on the troopers, but the Guardsmen set up an ambush in this spot and killed the Hitlerites. Fighting went on even in the flues. They fought for several days in one narrow tunnel."

Airborne troopers of 13th Guards Division (3rd Airborne Corps) also fought just as heroically. On 14 September the Hitlerites captured the train station and moved to the Volga in the vicinity of Kuporoskoye. Now Sixty-Second Army was cut off not only from the north, but from the south as well. At night units of 13th Guards Rifle Division of Gen A. I. Rodimtsev began to arrive at the central crossing from the left bank. They entered battle from the move and beat the enemy from the center of the city. On 16 September the Hitlerites were also thrown back from Mamayev Kurgan.

A violent battle went on for the train station until 27 September. It switched hands 13 times. City streets and squares were transformed into an arena of bloody fighting which did not die down until the end of the battle. The 42nd Regiment of 13th Guards Rifle Division was operating in the vicinity of Ninth of January Square. The intense battles continued here for over two months.

Here is how Mar SU V. I. Chuykov characterized the combat actions of 13th Division in Machalo puti.

"...From 14 through 25 September the Division took on itself the main thrust of the Germans. It fought for 10 days with unprecedented stubbornness. I can say frankly that, were it not for Rodimtsev's division, Stalingrad would have been completely in the hands of the enemy by mid September..."¹

Much has been written about the exploits of Rodimtsev's Guardsmen.

On 31 October 1942 a front newspaper reported the following under the title "Pavlov's House":

"For over 30 days a group of Guardsmen commanded by Gds Sgt Pavlov, from a unit belonging to Hero of the Soviet Union Rodimtsev, defended one of the houses having importance in the defense of Stalingrad. The unit calls this house 'Pavlov's House.' It is not an isolated episode in the Guardsmen's battle. On the contrary, there is nothing accidental about it at all. Here the commander's concept is remarkably combined with exemplary fulfillment.

Pavlov's House is a symbol of the heroic fight of all defenders of Stalingrad. It will go down in the history of the defense of the glorious city as a memorial to military ability and the valor of the Guardsmen."

¹V. I. Chuykov, Machalo puti, p. 243.

Pavlov's House was a permanent base of operations from which regimental scouts of Lt Losev's famed platoon conducted their operations.

Losev's fame spread in the regiment as an unsurpassed master in the business of getting "tongues." There were probably few scouts in all the division who had as many captured Hitlerites on their account.

Losev's abilities as a scout came out only during the war. None of his comrades in the Komsomol dormitory in Nizhnyaya Gubakha would hardly have supposed that such a talent would be found in this small, grey-eyed peasant lad.

Airborne training also helped develop in Losev the best qualities of a scout. By that time he had already made 56 jumps and, moreover, had taken part in the fighting on Khalkhin-Gol in 1939. Courage and fearlessness, resourcefulness and sharpness became characteristic of Losev. In short, Lt Losev found his true calling: he became a scout.

The imposing tally of captured "tongues" was increased by three Hitlerites captured during nighttime excursions from Pavlov's House.

Not so long ago Krasnaya zvezda aided in revealing one further bright page in the heroism of airborne troops displayed at Stalingrad. In a report by F. Sveshnikov entitled "An Army Overcoat Hangs in the Museum..." the reader is presented with a colorful picture of the Commander of 35th Guards Rifle Division, parachutist Gen V. A. Glazkov. It was discovered that the overcoat of the General, who perished in combat at Kuporosnaya Ravine, contained 160 holes from bullets and fragments. That is how the airborne troops fought at Stalingrad.

In the Forests and Swamps of Karelia

In June 1944 troops of the Karelian Front were preparing for an attack in order to liberate the southern part of Soviet Karelia from the enemy. The attack was to begin from the position on the Svir' River, on which enemy troops were halted in the summer of 1941. The Finnish troops operating here occupied a large base of operations on the right bank of the river in the sector Cshta and Svir'stroy.

The front along the Svir' was static for almost three years. The enemy had not wasted this time: he dug deep into the earth and created powerful fortifications. A particularly strong defense was set up along the axis Lodeynoye Pole, Olonets, and Pitkyaranta, which covered the main supply lines for troops operating in Southern Karelia. Here three lines of defense were prepared, the most powerful of which -- the second one -- was in the sector Megrozzero, Obzha. In addition, strong field positions were set up ahead of time along the banks of the Vidlitsa and Tulemavoki rivers and along the line Pitkyaranta and Laymola. Army Group Olonets, numbering five infantry divisions and four separate brigades, defended on the Svir'.¹

¹See Istoriya Velikoy Otechestvennoy voiny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945, V. 4, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1964, p. 137.

The task of liberating Southern Karelia was assigned to the Seventh and Thirty-Second armies of the Karelian Front.

The Seventh Army, commanded by Lt Gen. A. M. Krutnikov, delivered the main blow in the direction of Lodeynoye Pole, Clonets, and Pitkyaranta. Here is where an attack was to be made by the 37th Guards Rifle Corps of Maj Gen P. V. Mironov, which was part of the GHQ reserve. It included the 98th, 99th, and 100th Guards rifle divisions, which were manned by airborne troops. The Guardsmen of Col I. I. Blazhevich's 99th Guards Rifle Division received an important part in the forcing of the Svir'.

On the night of 20/21 June 1944 there were intensive preparations made for combat in units of 99th Guards Rifle Division and other large units of 37th Guards Rifle Corps. Troops were being massed and crossing equipment made ready under cover along the entire river bank.

The Army command made the decision to make a demonstration shift of fire to the depth of the enemy defense 15 minutes before the end of a 3½ hour artillery preparation, and indicate the beginning of the river crossing by a decoy landing force in the sector where 99th Guards Rifle Division was to cross. Dummies of men and guns were placed on rafts. It was assured that once the enemy discovered the beginning of the crossing, he would open fire from undamaged artillery pieces and mortars, and possibly from new, undetected firing positions. This would make it possible for our scouts and observers to pinpoint the rejuvenated enemy firing points and decisively suppress them by a new artillery onslaught and air strikes, thus ensuring an unhindered river crossing by attacking forces.

Volunteers from Maj V. F. Matokhin's battalion of 300th Guards Rifle Regiment were to be included in the decoy landing force. There were so many volunteers that the Regimental Commander, Col N. A. Danilov, had to speak personally with each one and pick only 12 men who were most physically fit, who could swim well, and who were the bravest. All of them were Komsomol members. Five were from the Volga region, born in the city of Ul'yanovsk — the native city of the great Lenin. The group was headed by Gds Sr Sgt V. I. Nemchikov, a native of Leningrad.

The three days immediately preceding the crossing were tense. The men went until late at night learning how to assault a heavily fortified defense. First they trained in small groups, then as platoons, companies, and battalions, and even with live firing. Everything was as in actual combat: guns and mortars pounded, shrapnel whined, and the men ran headlong after the fire barrage, trying to press as closely as possible to the bursts of their own shells. The airborne troops quickly surmounted wire obstacles, burst into trenches and cleared them of the enemy with the skilled use of bayonet and grenade. Several times the airborne troops crossed water barriers on makeshift equipment and went into the attack from the move.

Soon the Regimental Commander, Col N. A. Danilov, called the troopers in to see him. His observation post was on a hill not far from the edge of

the city of Lodeynoye Pole, behind the ruins of the Hospital imeni Kalinin. From here the gentle right bank of the Svir' could be seen as clearly as one's own hand. The entire bank was cut up with trenches and communicating passageways, and in many spots the tops of reinforced concrete pillboxes rose up. That was the enemy's forward line of defense.

A lamp burned dimly in the dugout of the observation post. Yellow sand walls shone with mica starlets. The Regimental Commander, Col N. A. Danilov, bent over a map as he sat behind a table. Seated wherever there was room in the corner were M. R. Popov, A. F. Baryshev, V. A. Markelov, I. S. Zazhigin, I. P. Mytarev, and other volunteers. There were now 12.

"Listen carefully," began the Colonel, glancing at the Guardsmen. "Tomorrow you will be carrying out an important mission. Airborne troops can handle it -- just act as always, decisively, boldly, and sensibly..."

Danilov's voice was a commander's strict, but kindly, tone. Each of his words made a deep impression on the men and gave them confidence in success. Now each one clearly saw the entire complexity of the task. It was not so easy to descend a steep bank in view of the enemy, plunge into the river, and swim, pushing ahead of themselves the rafts with dummy personnel, creating the picture of a mass crossing, calling down enemy fire on themselves, managing to periodically answer the fire, and thus creating a complete illusion of the beginning of a crossing by an advanced echelon.

The airborne troops emerged from the dugout and looked attentively at the enemy bank. Suddenly a heavy volley sounded, then a second and a third in rapid succession: the artillery rounds merged into one overall din. Shells burst along the entire bank occupied by the enemy. The enemy was silent, taking shelter under his reinforced concrete hoods.

Forty minutes remained until the end of the artillery preparation. The men of a submachine gun company launched the rafts. A wind blew from the bank, dispersing the fog over the river.

"Now!" Gds Sr Sgt V. I. Nemchikov waved his arm.

Slowly but persistently, the rafts began to move forward, toward the middle of the river. The enemy became nervous. Artillery and mortar rounds were added to the frequent chatter of machine guns.

The enemy's firing points were pinpointed, and then friendly artillery came to the aid of the airborne troopers. Shells of heavy batteries whined over their heads. The rounds burst on the surface of the pillboxes and tore out hunks of concrete.

But the enemy was not silent: he brought down all his fire on the approaching rafts. As they exploded, the shells raised huge fountains of water. The rafts were thrown from side to side. At any minute they could be overturned and bury beneath themselves the daring men, but the latter,

reloading their magazines, gave answering fire and led the enemy into even greater confusion. The latter in his turn revealed his system of fires even more fully.

Suddenly an enemy shell exploded quite near. The shock wave caught Pvt Ivan Mytarev, separated him from the raft, and threw him far to one side. A dull pain ran along his body, and his head swam. Water penetrated into his nose and ears.

Straining his last energies, barely paddling the water with his hands, Mytarev rushed forward to catch up with the raft.

A fascist machine gunner saw it all and began to fire short bursts at Mytarev. He fired unhurriedly, with great restraint, as at a firing range. He would fire 5-6 cartridges and then stop, looking to see where this invulnerable soldier would appear the next time.

Our shells were bursting over the enemy defenses more and more frequently, and under the shambles of a pillbox lay buried the machine gunner who was pursuing Mytarev with his bursts. Dozens of other enemy firing points were silent.

When they caught sight of dozens of new rafts on the river, the White Finns and Hitlerites ran through the trench in panic. Machine gun and sub-machine gun bursts began to beat upon the water more infrequently. Our artillerymen fired without a miss.

"Aha..." Ivan exclaimed. Gasping, he waved his arms absurdly and went to the bottom. Then he came up and in 2-3 seconds again disappeared.

"I won't make it, it's the end..." was the thought that flashed through Mytarev's mind. But suddenly his foot struck something firm, and he was shoved to the surface.

"Land," he wanted to shout, but there was only a wheeze in place of a sound. Still treading water, which was still up to his chin, Mytarev slowly moved one foot after another and approached the bank.

The water was to his waist, to his knees. He had the thought that his grenade would not go off. Taking one from his belt, he pulled the pin...

An explosion... One rush, and Mytarev was in the trench. Beside him to the right and left he saw his comrades from the other rafts. It wasn't difficult to find a submachine gun. He had left his on the raft. Now, firing from a captured gun, Mytarev sought out targets. Meanwhile the crossing was going full force. It seemed there would never be an end to the rafts. This added still greater strength and confidence in full success.

Suddenly a unanimous "hurrah" sounded, echoed by many voices. These were the Guards airborne troopers who had already landed on the shore.

The enemy defenses were broken once and for all. The soldiers went forward in pursuit of the retreating foe. In the general skirmish line of the attackers, wet to the skin, went the 12 hero Komsomol members.

The special mission was accomplished. The Svir' River was left far behind, after the best fighters -- the airborne parachutists -- had been sent to force it.

Every person experiences days which he remembers all his life. They are not erased from memory by time or new experiences. Just as unforgettable for Gds Sr Sgt Vladimir Nemchikov and his combat friends was that day of 12 September 1944, when they were summoned to Moscow, to the Kremlin, among 15 other soldiers of the Division, for the award of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star of a Hero of the Soviet Union.

But it was not only the soldiers of 300th Guards Rifle Regiment who distinguished themselves in fighting on the Svir'. Mass heroism was a real standard of conduct of airborne troopers in other units of the Division as well.

The 303rd Guards Regiment commanded by Lt Col V. A. Sokolov forced the Svir' in a headlong rush and broke through the enemy defenses on the Division's right flank. Later the main body of the Regiment moved to the north, while one battalion hurried to the Svir' Hydroelectric Station and prevented the enemy from destroying the dam there. For 4 days V. A. Sokolov's regiment operated in the deep rear of the enemy. It moved without use of roads through difficult forests and swamps, fighting for more than 30 kilometers. In so doing, it liberated 16 populated points and took nine enemy strong points and three centers of resistance. The regiment's daring actions threatened the enemy with encirclement as he was stubbornly defending the line Sambatuksa, Megriga, and forced him to abandon the favorable and heavily fortified positions.

V. A. Sokolov was given the title Hero of the Soviet Union for courage displayed in the enemy rear, and the officers and men of the regiment were presented with orders and medals.

The 98th, 99th, and 100th Guards rifle divisions were awarded the honorary designation "Svir'" for the successful crossing of that river, and they received the thanks of the Supreme Commander. Moscow saluted the heroes of the Svir' crossing.

In the first days of August, when peace talks had begun between the governments of the Soviet Union and Finland and combat operations had practically ceased, the 37th Guards Rifle Corps was called from the Karelian Front into the reserve of the GHQ Supreme Command.

On 9 August the 99th Guards Rifle Division received a visit by the Commander of the Karelian Front, Mar SU K. A. Meretskov, and Member of the Front Military Council, Lt Gen T. F. Shtykov. They expressed thanks to the officers

and men for their heroic combat deeds and wished them new military exploits on those sectors of the front to which they would be sent by their Motherland.

Budapest

Examples of valor and heroism were displayed by airborne troopers in many operations in the concluding phases of the Great Patriotic War, including the Budapest operation by Third Ukrainian Front.

At the end of December 1944 forces of Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts encircled the enemy Budapest grouping, numbering over 188,000 men, and immediately began to eliminate it. However, this process dragged on, due to events on the external front of encirclement.

"In January 1945 the fascist German command attempted to organize a counteroffensive at Budapest with the goal of smashing forces of Third Ukrainian Front on the west bank of the Danube, lifting the blockade of the surrounded grouping, and restoring his defenses on the Danube. The enemy struck three blows against troops of this Front.

...As a result of the first blow the fascist German command did not obtain substantial success. Nevertheless, it did not give up its intentions of renewing the attack on Budapest. Leaving the composition of the group of forces on the axis of the first blow almost unchanged, the enemy massed a new shock grouping in the vicinity of the bulge south of Mór. This force included three tank divisions and one cavalry brigade. From here the Hitlerites planned to attack our troops in the direction of Zamoj in order to link up with the main forces attacking from the north, and together continue the attack on Budapest."¹

In spite of the enemy's considerable superiority in men and materiel (threefold in men, 3.6 times in guns and mortars, and six times in tanks), he had advanced only 6-7 kilometers in 5 days.

Guards airborne troopers took part along with other forces in repulsing the blow of the three tank divisions attacking in a comparatively narrow sector of the front.

The fascist German attack began at 0840 hours on 7 January. As was expected, the main blow was struck in the zone of defense of the 20th Guards Rifle Corps, which included the 5th and 7th airborne divisions, in the general direction of Zamoj.

The 5th Guards Airborne Division of Maj Gen P. I. Afonin particularly distinguished itself in these battles. On 7 January troops of this division had to repulse an attack in which 120 enemy tanks and assault guns took part.

¹ Istorija Velikoy Otechestvennoy voyny Sovetskogo Soyuza 1941-1945.
v. 4, pp. 397, 399.

The enemy attack had only limited success thanks to the firmness of the Guards paratroopers, supported by powerful artillery fire and reinforced with engineer obstacles. By the end of the day the enemy had managed to wedge only 4 kilometers into our defenses, at the cost of over 40 tanks and assault guns.

Heavy fighting went on through 8, 9, and 10 January. The enemy tried to break the Guardsmen's resistance by throwing in more and more forces. In spite of the enemy's great numerical superiority, the Soviet soldiers defended their positions with valor. During the fight for the populated point of Bakhida, Pvt I. P. Avdeyev of the 107th Guards Rifle Regiment became surrounded. With his submachine gun and grenades, he killed over 20 fascists, then made his way to his company. The brave and skilled soldier was awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

During the period 11 through 13 January the fascist German command once more tried to make a deep breakthrough to Zamoy. Our positions, particularly those of the 5th Guards Airborne Division, were attacked by 100 tanks and two regiments of motorized infantry. On 11 January the enemy succeeded in taking Zamoy. Further advance of the fascist German troops on this axis was halted. The enemy shock grouping was exhausted and lifeless.

Soldiers of 5th Guards Airborne Division stood to the death in the combat for Zamoy. Guardsmen of the company commanded by Lt V. A. Korobiynikov of 2nd Battalion, 11th Guards Airborne Regiment, repulsed an attack by fascist tanks and infantry. They perished, but did not let the enemy pass.

The artillerymen were no less steadfast in fighting. From its firing positions west of Zamoy a battery of the 1963rd Antitank Regiment set fire to four tanks and burned up five in 40 minutes of battle. Over 20 enemy tanks broke through and came right up to the battery. Hundreds of shells burst about the guns, but the artillerymen did not waver. Seven enemy tanks moved toward the firing positions of the platoon of Tech-Jr Lt S. I. Yermolayev. The platoon knocked out three more Tigers. All gun crews were put out of action by enemy fire, and all ammunition was expended. Only Komsomol member Yermolayev remained against four Tigers. He grabbed up an antitank grenade, but could not throw it due to a serious wound in his arm. Then he took another grenade in his other hand and threw himself under the tank. An explosion was heard and the tank was blown up. Several days later Tech-Jr Lt S. I. Yermolayev was posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union by Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet.

Thanks to the bold and courageous actions of the airborne troops, the position of the 5th Guards Airborne Division was restored.

On 13 January, after suffering enormous losses, the enemy was forced to cease his attacks. A second counterblow was repulsed, and on the following day troops of Fourth Guards Army, including the 40th and 41st Guards rifle divisions (former airborne divisions) and the 5th and 7th Guards airborne divisions, themselves moved into the attack. After breaking the enemy resistance, they began to retake the positions lost during two enemy counterblows.

Airborne troopers of 7th Guards Order of Red Banner and Bogdan Khmel'nitskiy Airborne Division fought heroically along with other soldiers to the last day of the Great Patriotic War, and wrote many glorious combat pages in its history.

The Vienna Axis

From 16 March through 15 April 1945 troops of Second and Third Ukrainian Fronts waged the Vienna Offensive. Fourth and Ninth Guards armies were operating on the axis of the main blow in the Third Ukrainian Front. Ninth Guards Army did not take part in the preceding defensive engagements in Hungary, but was preparing for the attack on the Vienna Axis.

Ninth Army was manned by selected personnel of the airborne forces and was well equipped with weapons and combat equipment. Each rifle company numbered 140 men. This Army was commanded by an experienced military man, Col Gen V. V. Glagolev. Maj Gen S. Ye. Rozhdestvenskiy was named Chief of Staff and Maj Gen G. P. Gromov was made Member of the Military Council.

The Guards corps were commanded by the following: 37th -- Lt Gen P. V. Mironov; 38th -- Lt Gen A. I. Utvenko; and 39th -- Lt Gen P. F. Tikhonov.

On 16 March 1945 Ninth and Fourth Guards armies carried out the plan of the Commander of Third Ukrainian Front and moved into the attack with the mission of breaking through the enemy defenses north of the city of Szekesfehervar and, together with troops of Twenty-Seventh and Twenty-Sixth armies, destroying the enemy tank grouping between lakes Velentse and Balaton.

The 37th Guards Corps was to play an important part in the operations of Ninth Guards Army.

Taking into account the echelon formation of the enemy defenses on his right flank and the presence here of heavily fortified centers, the Corps Commander decided to deliver the main blow with the left flank in the direction of Sherkarestesh and Chor. In coordinated action with the adjacent unit to the left, he would isolate the defense of the Germans, cut off the roads leading from Szekesfehervar to the northwest, and destroy the enemy in the vicinity of Sherkarestesh and Hill 215. Subsequently, advancing in the direction of Varpalota and Sin'yu, he would move to the north shore of Lake Balaton.

The 99th Guards Rifle Division commanded by Maj Gen I. I. Blazhevich operated on the main axis of advance.

As early as 12 March 1945 the 99th Guards Rifle Division occupied its positions and began preparing for the attack. Opposite it were elite SS Panzer units.

Taking into account the fact that his personnel had no experience in fighting tanks, since the White Finns in Karelia did not employ them, the Division Commander ordered all subunits to hold training on the subject: "A tank is not dangerous for the bold and skilled."

Training sessions were set up for artillerymen and crews of antitank rifles.

Forty six Guards antitank riflemen of Col N. A. Danilov's 300th Regiment took the following oath: "Every Hitlerite armored vehicle will be destroyed, no matter how many appear in our path. We will extend the combat glory of the battalion which nurtured 12 Heroes of the Soviet Union."¹

During the day of 16 March, after a two-hour artillery preparation, the veterans of the Svir' attacked.

Guardsmen of the 303rd Regiment of Hero of Soviet Union Lt Col V. A. Sokolov particularly distinguished themselves in the battles for Sherkarestesh. They were the first to burst into the southwestern part of the village. They repulsed several enemy counterattacks by up to a battalion of infantry supported by tanks, and threatened to encircle the enemy, thus forcing him to begin a withdrawal in the western and southwestern directions. Forty Komsomol members headed by Battalion Komsomol Organizer Jr Lt P. I. Lavrent'yev made a daring night attack, captured the station of Mokha, and held it through violent attacks by enemy tanks and infantry until the arrival of the Regiment.

In the vicinity of the Dorbala Manor, over 10 tanks and 15 armored personnel carriers moved against the combat formations of 297th Guards Rifle Regiment. Headed by their fearless Regimental Commander, Col A. S. Bondarenko, the troops used grenades and antitank rifle fire to beat off enemy attacks. They burned up six tanks and eight armored personnel carriers. Several days later A. S. Bondarenko's Guardsmen killed 250 Hitlerites with trench knives and submachine gun fire in battles for the village of Berkhida.²

The Division's soldiers performed numerous heroic deeds. In three days the battery of Party member Lt Pereshivanny knocked out and destroyed 15 tanks and three armored personnel carriers. During an attack the men of Lt Rodin's platoon took three cannon from the enemy and immediately opened fire with them. Seeing that all officers had been put out of action, MSgt Reva took over the company and under his leadership the men beat off four enemy counterattacks. In 2 days Pfc Simonov knocked out two tanks and a vehicle with his antitank rifle. A leaflet was put out in honor of his deed. It began: "A Guardsman does not fear enemy tanks; there is no force capable of stopping the renowned Guards..."

Soldiers of other services were also not lagging behind. Aid man Pavel Shestakov carried 80 wounded from the battlefield with their weapons. After being transferred to line duty, he captured an enemy gun, and used it to knock out a self-propelled artillery piece and kill many Hitlerites. Signalmen Ignat'yev, Fedorovtsev, and Kapustin stumbled across a group of fascists while carrying out an assignment and entered into combat with them. In the brief skirmish they killed six enemy soldiers.

¹Army newspaper V reshayushchiv boy (In Decisive Combat), 18 March 1945, No. 52.

²See Division newspaper Leninets (Leninist), 23 March 1945.

During the attack from 16 through 21 March the Division beat off stubborn counterattacks by elite fascist Panzer divisions called "Adolf Hitler" and "Death Head" fought for approximately 50 kilometers, overcame a total of up to 25 kilometers of trenches and killed over 4,250 enemy officers and men and destroyed 80 tanks and armored personnel carriers. Twenty populated points were liberated.

The 98th Guards Rifle Division of this same Corps, commanded by Maj Gen V. V. Larin, also distinguished itself in the March battles southwest of Budapest.

Order No. 306 of the Supreme Commander dated 24 March 1945 stated: "Troops of Third Ukrainian Front beat off attacks by 11 German Panzer divisions southwest of Budapest and exhausted them in defensive battles. They then took the offensive, smashed the German tank group, and advanced for a distance of over 100 kilometers."

Among the troops who distinguished themselves in this fighting, the Order noted the large units of Col Gen V. V. Glagolev, including 98th and 99th Guards Svir' rifle divisions. Moscow gave a salute in honor of the heroes.

The Battles For Vienna

After defeating the enemy troops southwest of Budapest, forces of Third Ukrainian Front successfully developed the offensive on the Vienna Axis at the end of March.

On 1 April 1945 troops of Fourth and Ninth Guards and Sixth Tank armies received the mission of taking Vienna and moving to the line Tulln, Sankt Poelten, Lilienfeld.

The morale of the airborne troopers was exceptionally high. They were very conscious of their mission of liberation, and burned with the desire to free the peoples of Hungary and Austria from the fascist invaders as quickly as possible and end the war with victory.

The high spirits of the airborne troops during preparation for the offensive were expressed by the fact that hundreds of soldiers and commanders daily applied for acceptance into the Communist Party and Leninist Komsomol. They were ready to give their all, their lives if necessary, to the job of smashing the Hitlerite occupiers. Armed by the rich experience of combat, including in the enemy rear, our airborne troops had deep faith in their weapons and in victory.

The Hitlerite command massed a strong grouping in the vicinity of Vienna, including eight Panzer and one infantry division. In addition, it had up to 15 separate infantry battalions and Volksturm battalions. The enemy prepared a strong defense both in the capital and on approaches to it. The Commander of Third Ukrainian Front assigned Ninth Guards Army the mission:

39th Guards Rifle Corps, advancing right behind tanks of Sixth Guards Tank Army, was to enter the southwestern part of Vienna; meanwhile, 38th Guards Rifle Corps was to interdict the Vienna to Linz Highway, further develop the attack in the direction of Tulln, and move all divisions to a line west of Vienna to support the actions of the main Front grouping on Vienna from the west.

Inasmuch as Twenty-Sixth Army, operating to the left of Ninth Guards Army, lagged behind, the 37th Guards Rifle Corps was given the task of supporting the attack of the left flank of the Front shock grouping, which was exposed from the southwest. The Corps would have to beat the enemy from a number of major populated points and occupy them with reinforced garrisons. This was no easy task for the Corps troops.

One of these large centers of enemy resistance on the approaches to Vienna and on the route of advance of 37th Guards Rifle Corps was the industrial city and major rail junction of Wiener-Neustadt.

Trying to hold Wiener-Neustadt at all costs, the enemy drew in the remnants of his smashed units for its defense. It seemed everyone was here: 46th Regiment of 2nd Hungarian Infantry Division, an officers' school, and police and fire departments of the cities of Wiener-Neustadt and Vienna. Units of 99th Guards Rifle Division were advancing on the Wiener-Neustadt axis. Maj Gen I. I. Blazhevich, Division Commander, gave the task of taking the city to 297th Regiment of Col A. S. Bondarenko, in coordination with 303rd Regiment of Lt Col V. A. Sokolov.

On 3 April 1945 297th Regiment attacked Wiener-Neustadt by surprise without artillery preparation from the west and broke into the city. The Regiment moved to the northeast, and by the middle of the day had come to the northern outskirts of the city and captured the airfield.

The Army newspaper told about this victory: "In Wiener-Neustadt our subunits captured big trophies -- several hundred railroad cars, many locomotives, tanks and self-propelled guns, several hundred machine guns and a large number of depots with various military supplies and rations.

Our troops' blow was so forceful that the enemy had no time to blow up or damage enterprises. We captured an aviation plant which produced Messerschmitts and a locomotive plant completely intact."¹

Meanwhile 303rd Regiment attacked from the south and took the small city of Bad Fischau, capturing 20 aircraft and 100 aircraft cannon and freeing several hundred Soviet citizens from fascist camps.

The capture of Wiener-Neustadt was noted in an order of the Supreme Commander. For the third time in 10 days Moscow saluted in honor of the Svir' Guardsmen.

¹ V reshavushchiy boy, 5 April 1945, No. 69.

Division units broke into the Alps in pursuit of the enemy. On the night of 4/5 April the 297th Regiment, under the difficult conditions of the mountainous and forested terrain, moved into the enemy rear with a bold wide envelopment, captured the city and railroad station of Pattenstein, and cut off routes of withdrawal to the northwest for the smashed enemy units from the Adolf Hitler and Hitlerjugend Panzer divisions and the 356th Infantry Division, which were located in the area. The Regiment repulsed all enemy attempts to break through, and held its positions until the arrival of the Division main body. Then there began stubborn battles for many days in an attempt to take the small Austrian town of Berndorf -- an important enemy center of resistance south of Vienna.

Col A. V. Pokholkin, former Chief of the Division Operations Section, recalls: "The enemy stubbornly defended the city of Berndorf, and frontal assaults did not provide the desired results. In order to avoid unnecessary losses, the Division Commander decided to move the 297th Regiment into the enemy rear at night and from there deliver a blow against the city garrison. We carefully prepared the regiment for the raid during the latter half of the day. We studied the route, sent off scouts, and, when the scouts reported that there was no enemy on the planned route of movement, the regiment set off. At daybreak the next day the enemy was attacked both from the front and the rear, and was forced to flee in disorder, leaving a large number of killed on the battlefield."

The Division, which had been thinned out during the attack, operated mainly as separate detachments of from company to rifle battalion strength in the difficult mountainous and forested terrain. Frequently the detachments had to fight under conditions of total encirclement and in the deep rear of an enemy who was considerably superior to them in numbers and weaponry.

From 13 through 19 April 1945 the men of Capt Ye. N. Kryazhevskikh's 1st Battalion of 303rd Regiment fought courageously while fully surrounded, and beat off 6-13 enemy attacks each day. In a letter to the Regimental Commander, the Battalion Commander reported: "A handful of my eagles have beaten off the furious counterattacks of drunken Hitlerites and men of disciplinary units for five days. I am in a difficult situation, with not enough ammunition and no rations or water. In spite of this, I assure you that my Guardsmen will not retreat one step."¹

The Division Commander contacted Kryazhevskikh and ordered him to break through to friendly forces. To make the breakthrough easier, 79th Artillery Regiment was ordered to make a powerful fire assault on the enemy positions, and units of 303rd Regiment were ordered to attack from the front. With this coordinated action, Capt Kryazhevskikh's battalion broke through the ring of enemy troops on the night of 18/19 April and linked up with 303rd Regiment.

On 15 April a mobile detachment of 72 Guardsmen from 300th Regiment was formed for operations in the enemy rear. It was headed by Capt N. A. Belousov.

¹USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, fond 99, opis' 379771, delo 1, list 129.

"Act as a landing force," admonished the Division Commander in parting.

Having stealthily penetrated 30 kilometers into the enemy positions, the detachment approached the city of Pernitz. Here it established contact with Austrian partisans and with their help reconnoitered the approaches to the city, the location of the garrison, military objectives, and the enemy fire system.

On the night of 18/19 April Belousov's group burst into Pernitz, routed the headquarters of an SS detachment and the local Gestapo, killed up to 100 Hitlerites, blew up a paper factory containing an ammunition dump, and after mining the city approaches, moved safely out of the enemy rear.

An important factor in the success of Capt Belousov's detachment was the cooperation of the local populace. This was not by chance. Thanks to proper Party-political work among our troops, the Soviet soldiers, and in particular the Svir' Guardsmen, conducted themselves as befitting liberators. This the local inhabitants understood well.

Residents of a Czech village wrote to soldiers of 99th Division: "In the name of the residents of this village, we congratulate the Red Army, the liberating Army. We welcome you as our most dear guests. Accept from us bread and salt, as is the good old Czech custom."¹

The combat exploits of the Svir' Guardsmen were highly praised. Over 8,000 Guardsmen received orders and medals. The Military Council of Ninth Guards Army greeted the Division's soldiers as follows: "By Ukase of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet dated 26 April 1945, for exemplary fulfillment of assigned missions in battles against the fascist German invaders in taking the cities of Szekesfeharvar, Mon, Zarez, Veszprem, Elding, and for the valor and courage thus displayed, 99th Guards Svir' Rifle Division is awarded the Order of Kutuzov 2nd Class. The Army Military Council congratulates Division personnel with this high governmental award and expresses the firm assurance that the Division will henceforth fulfill in just as exemplary fashion any other mission in combat for the freedom and independence of the Soviet Motherland."²

On the same day the Division's rifle regiments were also rewarded: the 300th for the capture of the cities of Szombathely, Kashuvar, and Kőszeg was awarded the Order of Kutuzov 3rd Class; the 303rd and 297th for the capture of the cities of Wiener-Neustadt, Eisenstadt, and Neunkirchen were given the Order of Kutuzov 3rd Class and the Order of Aleksandr Nevsky, respectively.³ The Military Council of Ninth Guards Army congratulated them on the awards.

¹Leninets, 15 May 1945, No. 133.

²USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, fond 99, opis' 379774, delo 2, list 539.

³Ibid., listy 540-542.

The Division Commander, Gen I. I. Blazhevich, did not have the good fortune to live to see these happy days.

On 23 April 1945 Gen Blazhevich was mortally wounded by a mine while moving to a new command post. On 28 April the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet posthumously awarded I. I. Blazhevich the title of Hero of the Soviet Union for his heroic exploit in fulfilling the combat missions on the battle-front against the German invaders. Soldiers, sergeants, and officers who are veterans of the renowned 99th Guards Rifle Division remember their famous commander and consider it their duty to visit his grave when they go to Moscow.

Thus, large units of 37th Guards Rifle Corps did not take a direct part in the Battle for Vienna, but they were successful in supporting the advance of the left flank of the front shock grouping from the southwest, which greatly aided the successful actions of our troops on the Vienna Axis.

* * *

The battles on the approaches to Vienna began on the morning of 5 April. The enemy offered fierce resistance, and in spite of the decisive actions by Soviet forces, they did not manage to break the enemy resistance on this day.

That evening the Front Commander clarified the missions of the advancing troops: Ninth Guards Army was to assault the city from the south, and a portion of its forces were to envelop Vienna from the west. Beginning of the assault was set at 0730 hours on 6 April. In view of the fact that the greatest success on 5 April was in the zone of advance of 38th Guards Rifle Corps of Ninth Guards Army, operating on a secondary axis, the Front Commander, Mar SU F. I. Tolbukhin immediately took steps to exploit this success. Sixth Guards Tank Army was quickly regrouped into the zone of this Corps.

By this maneuver the initial concept of the assault of Vienna suffered substantial change. Now the troops of the right wing of Third Ukrainian Front were to deliver the main blow on Vienna not from the southwest, but from the west. As subsequent combat showed, the new decision to take Vienna from the west, made in accordance with the changed situation, fully justified itself.

The assault on Vienna was renewed on the morning of 6 April. The attack was again begun by troops of Fourth Guards Army, jointly with 39th Guards Rifle Corps of Ninth Guards Army. In the evening they moved to the southern and western outskirts of Vienna and entered the adjacent suburbs. Fierce fighting broke out within Vienna itself. Troops of Sixth Guards Tank Army and two corps of Ninth Army made a turning maneuver under difficult conditions of the eastern spurs of the Alps, moved to the western approaches to Vienna, and then moved to the south shore of the Danube in the vicinity of Tulln. The enemy grouping was surrounded from three sides.

Red banners were raised over the southern outskirts of the city in the predawn hours of 7 April. They summoned the troops forward, and the sons of

the Soviet Motherland moved into the assault. By evening, troops of Fourth Army and a portion of Ninth Army had penetrated even deeper into the city.

On 8 April the intensity of fighting in the city increased. By evening, large units of airborne troops moved slowly forward, enveloping more and more of the city center from the south and west.

During 9 and 10 April troops of Third Ukrainian Front continued to fight their way toward the center of the city. Fierce skirmishes broke out for each block, and sometimes for individual houses. In spite of this, the enemy troops defending Vienna were pressed by our troops: from the south and east by Fourth Army, and from the southwest and west by Ninth and Sixth Guards armies. However in the city center the enemy continued to resist between the Danube and the Danube Canal. The last battles for Vienna began.

Guardsmen of a battalion of 301st Airborne Regiment of 100th Guards Rifle Division performed a remarkable feat. On 9 April, after stubborn fighting, the advance company of Sr Lt F. Ya. Kulakov burst into the southwest outskirts of the Austrian capital. With it was the Battalion Commander, Capt G. A. Kaloyev. The Hitlerites surrounded the brave airborne troops three times, but each time were rolled back after heavy losses. Fighting heavily, the company moved meter by meter toward the center of the city. On 11 April it reached its goal and moved close to the Vienna shipping canal.

With the onset of darkness, a group of airborne troops headed by Kaloyev began forcing the river by swimming, supported by artillery fire. In a half hour the brave troops were on the opposite bank. Kaloyev immediately reported the fulfillment of his combat order. A new order came: to move into the vicinity of the only large bridge across the Danube, which was prepared for demolition by the fascists, and clear it of mines.

Capt Kaloyev broke his subunit into small groups and under cover of night moved to the big bridge along toward daybreak. The commander of the combat engineer platoon, MSgt S. A. Kuzakov, now Hero of the Soviet Union, carried out the order of the battalion commander and skillfully and quickly cleared the bridge of mines. Firing from all their weapons, Kaloyev's company cut off the routes of withdrawal for the fascists and supported the crossing by our units over the captured bridge.

Capt G. A. Kaloyev was awarded the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union for personal heroism displayed in this battle and for skillful leadership. Col Kaloyev serves even now in the airborne forces, educating young airborne troopers in the combat experience of the past war.

A banner of around 40 square meters is on display in the Central Museum of the USSR Armed Forces among numerous relics of combat glory. It is sewn from parachute silk, and on the cloth have been sewn a five-pointed star, a hammer, and sickle, all of enormous size.

In April 1945, on the day of the assault on Vienna, this banner was raised over the city to a height of 500 meters by Gds Lt A. E. Stomakhin with the help of a small captive balloon. A statement was drawn up for this occasion which is also kept in the museum.

Gds Lt A. E. Stomakhin took part in the Vienna offensive as Deputy Chief of Staff of 350th Guards Rifle Regiment.

Stomakhin had the idea of making a Victory Banner and raising it over Berlin, using a small captive balloon, but the unit in which he served operated on the Vienna Axis instead of the Berlin Axis.

All the equipment for the balloon -- winch, rope, and capsule -- was prepared in the unit with material at hand.

The Political Section of Ninth Guards Army instructed that a group be formed, headed by Gds Lt A. E. Stomakhin, to raise the Banner over Vienna. The night before the assault on Vienna, the group was given the mission of establishing places for passage through the enemy combat formations and a route of movement.

Stomakhin's group succeeded with great difficulty in making their way by night into the labyrinth of narrow Vienna streets and placing the winch and balloon on the Square of Heroes, above which it was planned to raise the banner.

The day was a fine one. The enormous silk cloth unfurled in the rays of the morning sun. A slight wind jostled the balloon on its rope. The banner soared above the center of Vienna a half kilometer high. The advancing Soviet units moved toward it, as warships move toward a beacon.

By the middle of 13 April Vienna was completely cleared of fascist German troops. In commemoration of the victory in the Battle of Vienna and for mass heroism displayed in the Vienna offensive, among the large units of Third Ukrainian Front receiving orders were 100th, 106th, and 107th Guards rifle divisions. The 38th and 39th Guards rifle corps of Ninth Guards Army were given the honorary designation of Vienna. Thousands of soldiers, commanders and airborne political workers were given governmental awards, and the most outstanding of them were given the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

Several words now about the last operation of the Great Patriotic War. As we know, in spite of the complete rout of fascist Germany, enemy resistance still continued in a number of areas, and it was especially stubborn in Bohemia and Moravia. An uprising by Prague workers on 5 May was threatened with defeat.

During the time when Prague was flowing with blood, the Soviet Army undertook the Prague Operation to help the people in their uprising. It had the goal of smashing the fascist German grouping and completely liberating Czechoslovakia.

Troops of First, Second, and Fourth Ukrainian fronts were to take part in the Prague operation. Ninth Guards Army under the command of Col Gen V. V. Glagolev was transferred from Third Ukrainian Front to reinforce Second Ukrainian Front. As part of the Front's shock grouping, it was to deliver a blow against Prague from an area south of Brno.

Immediately after arriving in the Second Ukrainian Front from Vienna, the Ninth Guards Army moved into the attack with five divisions on 8 May. It advanced 20 kilometers and took the city of Znojmo in coordination with units of Seventh Guards Army. On 10 May troops of First, Second, and Fourth Ukrainian fronts completed the encirclement of the grouping of Hitlerite forces in Czechoslovakia. Routes to the west and southwest were cut off for the troops of Schroeder's Group of Armies. The enemy's situation was hopeless, and resistance was senseless. Fifty disorganized enemy divisions were in the encirclement.

At dawn on 9 May the tank armies of First Ukrainian Front entered Prague, and Ninth Guards Army developed the attack against Pisek.

On 10 May advance subunits of 98th Guards Rifle Division of Ninth Guards Army met units of 26th Infantry Division of the American Third Army of Gen George Patton, Jr. in the vicinity of Pisek. When the Soviet and American troops met, the Commander of 26th Infantry Division, Maj Gen Willard Paul, presented American orders to two Soviet officers and six soldiers. The Commander of 98th Guards Rifle Division, Maj Gen V. M. Larin, presented one American officer with the Order of Patriotic War 2nd Class, and six soldiers of the allied army with medals.¹ On the next day airborne troops of 107th Guards Rifle Division of Maj Gen M. A. Bogdanov and 99th Guards Rifle Division of Col Z. I. Derziyan met American troops in the area south of Pisek and Nepolice [sic].

During 11 and 12 May Group of Armies Center was completely captured to the east of Prague. Thus ended the Prague operation -- the last operation by Soviet troops in Europe.

* * *

In June 1946 the Airborne Forces were transferred from the VVS into direct subordination to the Minister of Defense. They were headed by Col Gen V. V. Glagolev, Member of Military Council Lt Gen G. P. Gromov, and Chief of Staff Maj Gen S. Ye. Rozhdestvenskiy.

The Airborne Forces received Guards large units which had gone down the great and glorious combat trail from Moscow, Stalingrad, and the foothills of the Caucasus to Warsaw, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, and Prague. Many of them have on their combat banners orders and honorary designations for their services to the Motherland.

¹USSR Ministry of Defense Archives, fond 326, opis' 379771, delo 260, list 150.

Tens of thousands of airborne Guardsmen were awarded orders and medals during the years of the Great Patriotic War, and 130 of them were given the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union.

* * *

Over 20 years have gone by since the end of the Great Patriotic War, but the Soviet people have not forgotten those who gave their lives for the Motherland. And those who went through the whole war and returned home with victory will always remember their comrades in arms, and meet with them regularly.

The airborne veterans, too, hold annual meetings in prearranged places, recall combat exploits, and tell about them to soldiers and the youth.

In July 1966 veteran Svir' Guardsmen met on the high bank of the Svir' River, where in 1944 the 300th Guards Rifle Regiment (former 13th Guards Airborne Brigade) underwent its baptism of fire. This meeting in Lodeynoye Pole was an exceptionally stirring affair. It was a meeting not only with the sites of bloody battles, but also with the populace of the area where the fighting took place. For two days the veteran Svir' Guardsmen appeared in city enterprises and schools and on nearby collective farms.

NOTE: On p. 211 (p.235 of Russian text) in the key to the map, a space has been left for the name of the Austrian airfield, which is illegible in the copy.

Figures given in the table on p. 226 (p. 253) should be checked, as they were only partly readable.

Chapter IX

PAST EXPERIENCE AND CONCLUSIONS FOR THE PRESENT

In connection with the appearance of nuclear missiles and other means of mass destruction, some foreign military theoreticians have expressed doubt on the pages of the military press as to the worth of past combat experience as applied to the new organization, weaponry, and outfitting of troops.

The appearance of new types of weapons and the achievements in the field of science and technology have undoubtedly influenced and will influence military art and the principles of combat employment of troops, just as the latter in turn influence the development of science and technology.

However, in our opinion it would be totally incorrect to reject or fail to take account of the very rich experience of the last war, including that of airborne operations. It is without doubt that many principles and conclusions drawn therefrom will find application under the new conditions of combat. In addition, it is only through the sensible and critical use of this experience, taking account of changes which have taken place in the weaponry and outfitting of the army, that one can make the proper conclusions as to the organization and conduct of future airborne operations.

So with what can we arm ourselves for today in the question of using airborne landings that is instructive from past experience? Let us analyze the largest airborne operations of the past war. Here we will also refer to the experience of foreign armies who took part in the war.

We know that the following airborne operations were carried out in World War II for operational and strategic goals:

- airlanding by forces of Hitler's Army in Norway and Denmark in April 1940, and in Holland and Belgium in May 1940;
- the German Crete airborne operation in May 1941;
- Anglo-American airborne operation in Sicily in July 1943;

— Normandy airborne operation in June 1944;

— Arnhem airborne operation, or Operation "Market Garden," in Holland in September 1944. The latter was a code name for the airborne unit in this operation;

— Rhein airborne operation, or Operation "Varsity," in Germany in March 1945.

Other airborne operations conducted in Europe and the Pacific cannot be said to have had importance for the conduct of ground or naval combat operations, either in numbers taking part or in results achieved.

An objective study of all the above six airborne operations shows that not one can be said to have had decisive influence on fulfillment of the overall mission by ground forces. An exception is the operation conducted by the fascist German command in May 1940 in Holland and Belgium. The massive employment of airborne forces combined with barbaric bombing of defenseless cities by fascist aviation caused panic and confusion among the populace and in the army, and played an important role in the rapid capitulation by these states.

Foreign military theoreticians to this day believe the invasion of German airborne forces on the island of Crete to be the most decisive airborne operation in terms of results. However, one could evaluate this operation quite differently by naming just a few of the factors which aided the Hitlerites in capturing the island. German victory in the invasion of Crete was possible because their Air Force had won undivided aerial superiority and had chased the British Navy from the Eastern Mediterranean. As soon as the forces defending the island ceased receiving reinforcements, supplies, and support from the sea, their defeat essentially became a matter of time. Crete could have been seized by invasion from the sea as well, and probably with fewer losses than was the case with the use of airborne forces. True, the Germans tried to move reinforcements to Crete by sea on the night of 21/22 May 1941. This included heavy combat equipment. However, at this time the British fleet commanded this part of the Mediterranean, and destroyed a large part of the German convoy, thus disrupting the naval landing. But the day of 22 May was most serious for the English squadron as well. While attempting to smash a new German naval convoy of transports, the squadron came under the fiercest air strikes of the entire Crete operation and suffered heavy losses. Then the Germans were able to deliver reinforcements and weapons to the island unhindered and organize the supply of their forces by sea.

The Anglo-American airborne landing in Normandy undoubtedly helped in the initial successes of the amphibious landing, however it did not have decisive importance.

And in our opinion, the airborne landing of Anglo-American troops on the Rhine in 1945 was completely unnecessary. The Germans offered almost no

resistance, and allied troops had already crossed the river in a number of places and moved into the areas in which the parachutists dropped. This operation was of a propaganda nature and was not an operationally justified or required airborne operation. It is known that at that time Hitlerite Germany was close to surrender, taking into account the fact that major forces of the Soviet Union had massed on its eastern borders. Therefore there was no urgent necessity in employing the airborne forces. American ruling circles needed this to demonstrate their strength and to frighten the peoples of Europe.



The Arnhem Operation — thousands of parachutists drop into Holland (September 1944)

Referring to the fact that airborne forces did not play a major part in World War II, some military theoreticians draw the conclusion that their significance will also be small in a future war.

At the same time, leaders of many foreign armies believe that the role of airborne forces in present-day operations will increase, and therefore they insist on creating a powerful military air transport fleet.

The aforementioned airborne operations had a specific strategic or operational importance, and there is every reason to believe that airborne forces will find their place in a future war as well. This will largely depend on the development of military transport aviation, methods used in landing, and the military and technical outfitting of airborne forces.

In the past war Soviet airborne forces were employed to carry out the most varied missions under exceptionally difficult conditions: to aid

frontline troops in encircling large enemy groupings and in breaking through the enemy defense by a blow from the rear toward the frontline troops (the airlanding of 4th Airborne Corps in the vicinity of Vyaz'ma and south of Yukhnov); to capture bases of operations on large water obstacles so as to support a crossing by frontline troops and to aid in breaking through the enemy defenses situated along the water barrier by means of a blow from the rear (3rd and 5th airborne brigades on the Dnieper); to take enemy airfields in order to support an airlanding or to destroy enemy aircraft (landing of a force west of Medyn' and on Maykop Airfield); to aid naval landing forces in taking bases of operations and in landing on the coast (airborne landings at Odessa, Novorossiysk, and on the Kerch' Peninsula); to reinforce friendly forces operating in encirclement in the enemy rear, and to aid them in breaking out of encirclement (landing of a force west of Rzhev); to disrupt control of troops, demoralize the enemy rear, etc.

The Soviet Army received considerable combat experience in the employment of airborne landings to accomplish varied missions in the interests of advancing forces, under the most varied conditions: winter and summer, day and night.

No one except the Soviet Army in World War II employed airborne landing forces under severe winter conditions, with the enemy having a significant superiority in numbers over the landing force in the drop zone itself and nearby, and with an extremely limited number of air transports.

Anglo-American and fascist German airborne troops were usually used against a weak and demoralized enemy who offered them little resistance. The Americans used large airborne landing forces primarily in the second half of 1944 and in March 1945 under exceptionally favorable conditions resulting from the successful offensive by the Soviet Army on the Soviet-German front. This drew off to the east all the most combat-ready large units of enemy ground and air forces.

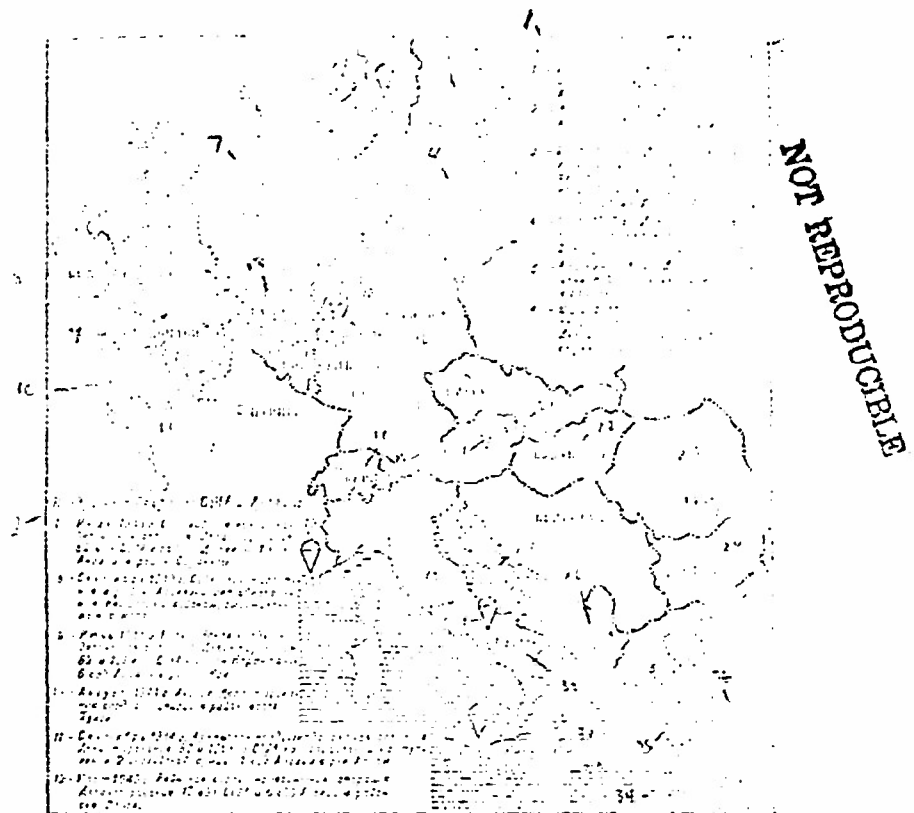
World War II showed that success in employing airborne landings depends not only on having a sufficient number of the requisite men and materiel, but also on the care taken in preparing and supporting the airborne operation and on how fully the peculiarities of combat employment of airborne troops, including their weak and strong aspects, are taken into account.

The role and importance of airborne landings continually increase under the present-day conditions of warfare, with the availability of powerful means of neutralizing an enemy to a great depth. Modern aviation technology permits the use of major airborne operations involving not only airborne forces, but also motorized rifle large units.

With their surprise and high mobility, airborne landing forces are capable of transferring the fighting to the enemy's deep rear in a short period of time, of capturing important positions and objectives, of disrupting rear area operations and control of troops, and of preventing the

enemy from maneuvering his reserves. All this ensures that offensive operations are conducted at a higher tempo and to a great depth. Airborne landing forces are the sole means for taking immediate advantage of the results of nuclear strikes against the enemy and for reinforcing these strikes on the spot.

What are the factors in the successful employment of airborne landings in a future war? The first is military transport aviation.



Airborne landings in the Western Theater of Operations during World War II

KEY: 1. German airborne landings: 1 — March 1938. Landing on Airfield during the occupation of Austria; 2 — April 1940. Landing near Stavanger and Oslo to seize airfields; 3 — May 1940. Landing by 7th Abn Div and 22nd Abn Div to seize airfields, bridges, and crossings on the Rhein and Meuse, and for subsequent operations against The Hague and Rotterdam; 4 — May 1940. Landing in Belgium to capture Fort Eben Emael

and crossings on the Meuse; 5 — April 1941. Landing of two parachute brigades to seize bridges near Corinth; 6 — May 1941. Crete operation, landing by 7th Abn Div and 6th Mountain Rifle Div; 2. U.S. and British airborne landings: 7 — July 1943. Sicily. Landing by U.S. 82nd Abn Div near Gela and by British 1st Abn Div near Syracuse; 8 — September 1943. U.S. landing near Avellino to secure a base of operations for troops landed by sea; 9 — June 1944. Normandy operation, landing by U.S. 82nd and 101st Abn Div near Carentan and by British 6th Abn Div near Caen; 10 — August 1944. England. Landing of composite division east of Toulon; 11 — September 1944. Arnhem operation. Landing by U.S. 82nd and 101st Abn Div to improve the offensive by British Second Army. Landing by British 1st Abn Div near Arnhem; 12 — March 1945. Rhein operation. Landing by U.S. 17th Abn Div and British 6th Abn Div north of Wesel; 3. Stockholm; 4. Copenhagen; 5. Oslo; 6. Stavanger; 7. North Sea; 8. Belfast; 9. London; 10. Carentan; 11. Caen; 12. Paris; 13. Brussels; 14. Rotterdam; 15. Wesel; 16. Berlin; 17. Arnhem; 18. The Hague; 19. Bern; 20. Prague; 21. Vienna; 22. Budapest; 23. Bucharest; 24. Sofia; 25. Belgrade; 26. Tirana; 27. Adriatic Sea; 28. Toulon; 29. Rome; 30. Avellino; 31. Gela; 32. Syracuse; 33. Sicily; 34. Crete (Gr.); 35. Corinth; 36. Athens.

One of the features of airborne operations on the Western and Voronezh fronts was the fact that they were conducted with very limited numbers of air transports. As a result, the drop of airborne forces into the enemy rear was considerably long drawn out in time. Therefore, the surprise appearance of airborne landing forces in the enemy rear could not be achieved to the degree planned and as is required under present-day conditions. It is also without doubt that the deficiency in aircraft for the Arnhem airborne operation affected its success.

It is believed that under today's conditions military transport aviation must be capable of ensuring the simultaneous take-off of the greatest number of large airborne units in the first hours of a war. If military transport aviation is able to quickly lift and move several airborne divisions or major reserves to a designated area, this in combination with nuclear strikes will permit suppression of the enemy over a great area. The threat of employment of major airborne forces will force the enemy to keep a large part of his troops at various places in the depth of his defenses in readiness to combat such landings.

In an article entitled "The Only Wars We Can Afford," the American military publicist Raymond Garthoff writes that "in order to be able to fight different kinds of wars, it would be desirable to have 4-6 airborne divisions ready for action."¹

The American command proposes to use several airborne divisions at the beginning of combat operations, and it keeps them in a state of high readiness. As one American military writer puts it, "even now it is assumed

¹ Army, November 1957, pp. 42-52.

that in the initial period of war the United States could move several infantry divisions simultaneously by air to any point on the globe."¹

A powerful military transport aviation with a sufficient number of airfields situated across a great area will ensure the dispersal of troops and equipment which are part of the first attack echelon, and at the same time will be able to move them quickly to the attack objectives. Such dispersal will be an important means of defense against nuclear weapons.

This is particularly important because a large number of military transport aircraft is needed for the airborne landing forces. For example, according to American figures, around 800 aircraft are required just to drop the first echelon of a U.S. airborne division as it is organized today.

The second factor which affects the success of employment of airborne landing forces is constant combat readiness of airborne forces and a reduction of the time needed to prepare them for conducting an airborne operation. This will be effective when airborne operations are conducted several hours after the decision is made to employ airborne forces.



Landing of American paratroopers and combat equipment

¹National Guard, August 1957, p. 16.

Some specialists maintain that airborne troops cannot be considered prepared until in training they can reach a drop zone several hundred kilometers away within a period of 24-36 hours after receiving the order to make a drop.¹

Maj F. Krause writes: "Experience showed that, having massed airborne forces in the morning somewhere on the territory of the United States, we are capable of delivering these forces by the next morning to some distant but strategically important region of the globe."

The next factors which determine the success of an airborne operation are: reconnaissance and selection of the initial area for massing troops and aviation, and of the drop zone and area of combat operations; choice of the time for beginning the drop; determination of the composition of the landing force in accordance with the assigned mission and military transports made available for the landing; determination of the depth at which the drop will be made, the duration of combat operations, etc.

Reconnaissance. The extreme difficulty of conducting airborne operations makes them greatly dependent on intelligence of all types.

Reconnaissance in the interests of an airborne force has its technical and tactical sides. The technical side includes detailed information on the nature of the terrain, the relief, presence of forests, elevations, natural defensive or antitank positions, etc.

Further, the information from technical intelligence is used to determine the size of available drop zones for paratroopers and landing strips for aircraft, inasmuch as it is necessary to determine the possibilities for airlanding and dropping troops, weapons, and equipment. In addition, drop zones and landing strips must be chosen so that airborne troops can quickly mass on them and repulse a surprise enemy attack.

Tactical intelligence must provide the commander of the landing force with all the information he needs on the enemy so that he can predict his probable responses, the time needed to begin operations against the troops being landed, and the directions from which he can be expected to approach. Naturally, the later the encounter with the enemy, the better it is for the airborne force. This is particularly important at the beginning of an operation, when the troops being landed are just bringing themselves into combat readiness after the drop and airlanding.

Reconnaissance must also reveal the enemy air grouping, especially the basing of that portion which might resist the landing and subsequent combat operations by the landing force. In addition, it is very important to establish the enemy's air defense system in the vicinity of the landing zone and along the flight routes taken by the transport aircraft.

¹See Wehrkunde, 1956, No. 5, pp. 234-237.

One of the features of reconnaissance conducted in the interests of an airborne landing force is that before the landing begins it is conducted only by the men and materiel of the higher headquarters. Only after the landing does the landing force itself begin to conduct reconnaissance. Aerial reconnaissance in the interests of the landing force must be in support of the decision to perform an airborne operation. The latest information on an enemy must be obtained in good time so that the planners can clarify the decision already made and, if necessary, take steps to neutralize the enemy in the area where the drop is to be made. If the situation in the drop zone abruptly changes by the beginning of the operation and it is impossible to make a drop there, the landing force can be retargeted to a new area (if several variations of the utilization of the force have been planned ahead of time).

The initial area can be a considerable distance from the front, since today's military transport aviation can be based a great distance from the front line and can be dispersed over a large area. This creates good conditions for setting up antiatomic defense and air defense of troops of the airborne force.

The dispersal of airborne troops and military transport aircraft reached enormous size even in operations of World War II. For example, in the Rhein airborne operation the troops and aircraft which participated were based on 11 airfields in Southern England and on 12 airfields near Paris.

In choosing an initial area, one must take account not only of its distance from the front line and the availability of airfields therein, but also the possibilities for concealment of units and the development of road networks and approaches to the airfields. Massing of military transports in the initial area must be done in a strictly limited amount of time, i.e. that required for loading and for boarding of the units in the landing force.

In addition, to ensure a maximum of flexibility in control and speed in the operations of the military transport aircraft, as well as a maximum of antiatomic defense, there should be a reduction in the number of air and airborne units using any one airfield. They should, moreover, be situated ahead of time and in the proper manner in the initial area, so as to avoid loss of time in movements during the preparations for the take-off.

It is recommended that marshalling areas and loading airfields be at such a distance one from another that considerable losses in personnel and combat equipment would be avoided in case of one enemy nuclear strike. This distance is calculated by considering the yield of nuclear weapons which the enemy would most probably employ. All steps must be taken to ensure that just before takeoff the men and aircraft are located together on the loading and enplaning airfields a minimum amount of time.

Not more than one combat group should be situated in each marshalling area. To ensure that personnel have maximum protection against the effects

of nuclear weapons in marshalling areas, it is recommended that measures of passive defense be taken, including concealment of men and combat equipment, organization of movement control, and creation of individual and group shelters. Marshalling areas must be situated in a place where troops and combat equipment can easily and conveniently be moved to departure airfields.¹

The drop zone. The deeper this zone is situated, the more difficult it will be to arrange for coordination of the airborne landing force with forces attacking from the front, especially tactical coordination. In determining the depth of the drop zone, it is necessary to take account of the plan of troop operations from the front: they must be capable of moving into the drop zone before the defender tries to destroy the landing force. In determining the drop zone location, one must also take into account the capabilities of military transport and combat aviation. The farther away is the drop zone, the greater is the number of transport aircraft required to deliver the landing force and to cover it from the air. One must take particular account of the range of fighter aviation.

The war showed that, in determining the drop zone and the zone of forthcoming combat operations by the landing force, one must consider the circumstance that units of the landing force will usually have a limited amount of time to accomplish their mission and a limited amount of mobile equipment. Consequently, their movement and regrouping in the enemy rear will be limited. This is why it is recommended that the drop zone be made to coincide with the zone of combat operations of the landing force, and the drop and landing areas be planned right near the attack objectives.

How many drop zones should there be in an objective area? This is determined by the composition and missions of the landing force, as well as by the opportunities for organizing antiatomic defense of troops after the landing.

Usually each tactical combat group is dropped by one air serial and lands at the same point. The number of aircraft in each serial is determined by the size and mission of the airborne tactical group capable of independently accomplishing its assigned combat mission.

There is no doubt that the number of drop zones must ensure accomplishment of missions assigned to units of the landing force, the dispersal of such units, and the extreme precision with which aircraft must make their runs over each zone. It must also ensure that the landing is made in a short period of time.

Therefore today it is not considered satisfactory to have a situation such as existed during the past war, when the landing of a force continued for more than a day, and the parachutists were scattered for great distances beyond the planned objective area. It is known that during the landing of American airborne forces in Normandy in June 1944, over half of the troops landed outside the boundaries of the planned zones, and 60 percent of their weapons and supplies were lost.

¹See Military Review, February 1960, pp. 36-44.

In choosing the objective areas one should be governed by the fact that at the moment units are dropped and in the very first hours after the landing, they must not be attacked by large enemy armored forces, and that immediately after landing they must be able to suppress enemy resistance in the objective area. At the same time, units of the landing force must not appear as a lucrative target for nuclear strikes.

Depth at which the landing is made depends, on the one hand, on the air transport capabilities, and on the other, on the rates of advance of troops operating from the front.

The depth at which forces were landed in operations of the Great Patriotic War did not exceed 30-40 kilometers from the front line. They were usually dropped in the enemy's tactical zone of defense. This was largely explained by the limited air transport capabilities, which led to landings made in several stages throughout one or several nights. In addition, the rates of advance of frontline troops were at that time low and did not ensure their rapid arrival in the area of operations of the airborne force. At the same time, the radius of action of front aviation was limited, and its basing frequently lagged behind the advance of ground forces. Therefore front aviation could not always ensure timely support of landing forces on the ground, especially those operating at a great depth.

The modern development of front and military transport aviation and nuclear weapons, as well as the extremely high rates of advance of highly mobile ground forces, permit the landing of airborne forces at a great depth.

During exercise Banyan-3 in 1959, units of 82nd Airborne Division and Tactical Air Command of the United States conducted joint airborne operations having important strategic significance, in the opinion of the Americans. The airborne units were massed on Pope Air Base in North Carolina, from which they were flown to the Panama Canal Zone. The aircraft flew 2,400 kilometers and dropped the parachutists to seize planned objectives.¹

Composition of the airborne force. This is determined each time based on the mission assigned to the force and the capabilities of transport aircraft made available for the landing. It is not always advisable to have a large force. It is believed that the massive landing of small forces can have considerable effect. This can dissipate the enemy's attention and means and lead him into confusion as to the main blow by troops attacking from the front.

Composition of the force and missions assigned determine the duration of independent combat operations which the force may undertake in the enemy rear while separated from the frontline troops.

Duration of independent combat operations by Soviet airborne forces in operations of the Great Patriotic War exceeded all norms existing in pre-war years.

¹See Military Review, November 1959, pp. 65-78.

The force operated in the enemy rear for from several days to several months. For example, operations by 4th Airborne Corps in the enemy rear lasted around 5 months, and those of 3rd and 5th airborne brigades on the right bank of the Dnieper — for almost 2 months. Maj Starchak's airborne force, which landed west of Medyn', operated against enemy rears for 18 days. The small tactical forces dropped at Odessa, Novorossiysk, Maykop, and in other places operated for from several hours to 1-2 days.

It must be noted that no more than 1-3 days were foreseen in planning all airborne operations.

The prolonged actions of our airborne forces in the enemy rear cannot be considered normal. They were caused by the situation which arose in the enemy rear after the forces landed.

As a rule, changes in the situation consisted of an increase in enemy forces both in the objective area and in sectors of operations of frontline forces moving to link up with the paratroopers. As a result, frontline troops were in no condition to develop an offensive in the zone of employment of the airborne force, and were forced to either cease or shift the offensive to some new axes where success appeared. The slow rates of landing due to limitations in the air transports led to delays in building up the forces of the landing party and to a loss of surprise. All this led, in the final



Parachutist scout

account, to the isolation of separate groups of the landing force and to its separation from frontline troops. In these cases the landing force was forced to conduct chiefly defensive battles or to switch to diversionary and partisan methods of operation without having accomplished the initial mission. This also explains the prolonged stay in the enemy rear. Thus, the experience of the Great Patriotic War shows that airborne landing forces must always be ready for prolonged independent operations in the enemy rear, in isolation from friendly forces. In planning the combat utilization of airborne forces, and in connection with the possible increase in duration of their independent operations, one must provide for increased medical personnel, supplies, and other personnel as reinforcement.

What was the duration of actions by airborne forces in operations of World War II in Western Europe?

Airborne operation	Composition	Length of time spent in combat		
		alone	with frontline troops	total
Holland (1940)	7th Abn Div (Ger.)	4-5 days	—	5 days
Crete (1941)	7th Abn Div (Ger.)	9 days	1 day	10 days
Normandy (1944)	6th Abn Div (U.K.)	24 hours	10 days	11 days
	82nd Abn Div (U.S.)	36 hours	34 days	36 days
	101st Abn Div (U.S.)	24 hours	36 days	37 days
Arnhem (1944)	1st Abn Div (U.K.)	8 days	—	8 days
	82nd Abn Div (U.S.)	30 hours	55 days	57 days
	101st Abn Div (U.S.)	24 hours	69 days	70 days
Rhein (1945)	6th Abn Div (U.K.)	24 hours	11-12 days	13 days
	17th Abn Div (U.S.)	24 hours	24 days	25 days

It is evident from the table that the duration of independent combat operations by airborne forces was from one to several days, and on an average did not exceed 2-5 days. It is assumed that in the future the duration of independent combat actions by airborne forces will not change essentially. For example, certain representatives of the West German Defense Ministry recommend planning an airborne operation on the basis that troop actions in the enemy rear will not last longer than 2 days. They base this period on the fact that the longer the landing force remains in the enemy rear, the more opportunities the enemy will have to destroy it, since they believe that supplementary support to the force entails great difficulties.¹

¹See E. Middeldorf, Handbuch der Taktik, Frankfurt a.M., 1957, p. 350.

Use of airborne troops for other than their primary purpose. In many operations of World War II a deficiency of reserves forced the Anglo-American command to make use of airborne forces in other capacities. Use of large airborne units as ordinary infantry units was so common that we can limit ourselves to several examples.

Operation	Abn Div	Mission	Duration in combat
Invasion of Southern Italy	1st (U.K.)	After landing at Taranto 9-12 September 1943 after conclusion of armistice with Italy, took part in pursuit of Germans. Then took up a defense and held its zone until November 1943.	Around 2½ months
German offensive in the Ardennes (December 1944)	17th (U.S.)	Flown from England to France, then sent to the southern flank of a pocket formed when German Sixth Panzer Army attacked; committed to combat on 30 December.	25 days
	82nd (U.S.)	Arrived near Liege on 20 December to cover northern flank of the pocket.	42 days
	101st (U.S.)	Arrived near Bastogne on 20 December to cover southern flank of the pocket; took up a defense and fell almost entirely into encirclement.	30 days
Invasion of Northern Germany (first days of May 1945)	6th, 17th, 82nd (U.S.)	Defended a position on the upper Elbe.	Around 1 week

It is also evident from the above that airborne troops operated for a prolonged time as ordinary field forces.

The examples show the universality of airborne forces. They can be in constant readiness for use in their primary job as airborne landing forces, and at the same time can be ready for operations as ordinary ground forces. Is this not the reason that units and large units of parachutists exist in all modern foreign armies? If a parachutist can always become a motorized rifleman, a crew member of a self-propelled artillery piece, an artilleryman, or a mortarman, and immediately enter combat, it is hardly any soldier of the ground forces who can be a parachutist. This undoubtedly complicates the combat training and organization of airborne units and large units, and places special demands on the command in the selection of personnel.

It is impossible to ignore the dependence of duration of independent combat operations by airborne forces on the choice of the time of landing. For example, 3rd and 5th airborne brigades of Voronezh Front were landed on the night of 24/25 September 1943, when the main forces of the Front were not yet fully ready to cross the Dnieper and expand the Sukrin base of operations. The first attack from this base of operations actually began only on 12 October, i.e. 16-17 days after the landing force had been dropped. On the one hand, this determined the duration of independent combat operations by the landing force, and on the other, had a negative effect on the attack by frontline troops.

The landing time was also chosen unfortunately in the Yuhnov offensive operation of the Western Front, when in February 1942 two airborne brigades (9th and 214th) were dropped to aid in encircling and destroying the enemy Yuhnov grouping jointly with troops attacking from the front. But the attack from the front against the Warsaw Highway by troops of Fiftieth Army did not succeed, and the airborne force could not link up with them either in February or in subsequent months. Under these conditions the mission of the airborne force began to undergo modification. Its stay in the enemy rear became excessively long and the nature of its operations differed little from partisan activities. There is no doubt that the operations of the landing force even in this instance did much damage to the enemy, but the force achieved the planned operational goals only to a limited degree. There were various forms of the beginning of drops of airborne forces in operations of World War II in Europe. For example, the drop of the German 7th and 22nd airborne divisions into Holland and Belgium began at the same time as the barbaric bombing of cities and military objectives, and along with the invasion of these countries by armored forces. On the other hand, in June 1944 the drop of parachutists began on the coast of Normandy several hours before the invasion of Anglo-American troops from the sea.

According to the views of U.S. military leaders, the landing of the assault echelon of a (parachute) landing force can begin either before the attack of ground forces, as was the case in a majority of operations of World War II, or with the beginning of their attack along with atomic, artillery, and air preparation, or in the course of the attack, when the main enemy defensive zone has been breached and he has committed his reserves. The followup echelon (airlanded) includes heavy combat equipment, supplies, and means of transportation. After landing, it links up with the assault echelon or moves to the area of its combat operations together with the advance units of ground forces.

As a rule, Soviet landing forces were landed at night during the Great Patriotic War. This required an exceptionally thorough and comprehensive training of crews of transport aircraft and of the airborne troops themselves, as well as serious measures for ensuring the precise run of aircraft over the drop zones. A number of serious errors were committed in the organization and conduct of a landing by 4th Airborne Corps in the Western Front, and by 3rd and 5th airborne brigades in Voronezh Front: imprecise drop of parachutists, a great scattering of men and supplies after the landing, etc.

This shows how complicated and responsible a task is the very process of landing, especially at night. One must always remember that errors committed in preparing for the landing before takeoff are hard to correct as the landing force flies to the target area, and during the landing phase such errors could lead to serious consequences.

Both day and night landings have their advantages and disadvantages. For this reason the Anglo-American military specialists recommend selecting the time for the landing and for forming up the military transport aircraft according to the specific situation.

According to their views, around 800 aircraft are required to drop the first echelon. The depth of the column for a daytime landing could be 200-250 kilometers with a time interval of 3-4 minutes between groups of 50-60 aircraft. Here, the basic formation is a vee of three flights of three aircraft each, for a total of nine aircraft.

Usually the distance between parallel flight paths is set at no less than 25 kilometers. In a night landing the depth of the column is approximately 2-3 times greater than during the day. When flying in formation to the objective area, the normal speed for piston aircraft is 350-450 kilometers per hour, and when approaching the drop zones for the parachutists it is 250-280 kilometers per hour.

Based on their combat experience and the experience of various exercises held in recent years, the Anglo-American command believes that under present-day conditions the flight of military transport aircraft in small groups and in several columns over different flight paths reduces the effectiveness of enemy antiaircraft defenses, and particularly nuclear missiles, employed against the airborne landing force.

During the flight of the landing force to the objective area the transport aircraft present a very visible and lucrative target for destruction both by ground and air defenses. To reduce to a minimum the vulnerability of airborne forces during their air movement, foreign military specialists recommend forming small aircraft serials and using multiple flight paths to the objective area. As a rule, each tactical group is moved by one aircraft serial and lands on the same point. The number of aircraft in each serial is determined by the size and mission of the tactical airborne group being landed. Flight routes over enemy territory are usually selected so as to take advantage of those areas in which the air defenses are most neutralized. Flights beyond the front line should be made at low altitudes, and the air transport units must be in such a formation in columns and along flight paths so that one burst of surface-to-air missiles does not destroy several air subunits.¹

Success of the landing depends largely on a proper selection of a flight altitude for the transports. A low-altitude flight facilitates navigation and increases distance, but in this case it is easier for the enemy

¹ See Military Review, February 1960, pp. 36-44.

to detect the force with radar and employ various weapons, including ZURS [zenitnyy upravlyayemyy reaktivnyy snaryad; surface-to-air guided missile], surface-to-air missiles, and medium and heavy artillery.

A low-altitude flight reduces the effectiveness of these weapons, but complicates navigation. The fire from small-caliber antiaircraft artillery and ordinary small arms becomes more effective.

In spite of the high degree of development of modern means of navigation and control, especially radar, a landing in the enemy rear remains, as before, a complex and responsible process on which largely depends the success of the entire airborne operation. In addition, the success of such a landing today depends to a great degree on a consideration of weather conditions.

One can work out a good operations plan, ensure aerial superiority and a sufficient number of transport aircraft, and ensure a rapid link-up of the landing force with troops attacking from the front, but one cannot always know beforehand nor believe the forecasts as to the weather during



Attack at dawn

the landing and subsequent operations by the airlanded troops. The weather is a vulnerable spot for airborne landing forces, which is quite evident in examples of the past war. One need only recall the snowy and stormy winter of 1941/42, which hindered the employment of Soviet airborne landing forces on the Western Front, or the destruction of the 1st Airborne Division (U.K.) at Arnhem in September 1944, which could not be supported by combat aviation nor properly landed due to poor weather.

An enormous number of aircraft which originate from various airfields must assume a specific combat formation and fly along multiple paths exactly

on a given course, without allowance for small deviations in time and distance measured in seconds and meters.

At present much work is going on abroad for the purpose of removing certain limitations on use of airborne forces due to weather, in particular, limitations on visibility. Ensuring the possibility of conducting airborne operations in bad weather will allow one to achieve surprise in employing the force and will complicate enemy opposition.

The conduct of an airborne operation demands the creation of certain favorable conditions for successful employment of airborne landing forces, as is done when conducting ordinary ground operations.

As soon as the decision is made to conduct an airborne operation, airborne and military transport units must receive the necessary preliminary instructions, intelligence, and other information as timely as possible, so that unit commanders can move their subunits to the initial area and prepare them for accomplishing the assigned mission. Therefore the airborne unit headquarters must know the condition of their units at all times: combat readiness, status of supplies, and requirements for military transport aircraft.

Continuous planning and conduct in peacetime of major joint exercises and maneuvers approximating combat conditions and involving the command and staffs of airborne troops, the air forces, ground and missile forces is of great importance in raising the combat readiness of airborne forces and the preparation of airborne operations in wartime in limited periods of time.

It is very important to have secrecy in preparing for an airborne operation, so as to avoid enemy countermeasures to disrupt it. Most instructive in this regard is the unfortunate experience of a landing by 4th Airborne Corps on the Western Front. When Corps units concentrated in the marshalling area, cover measures were poorly observed: parachute equipment was transported openly, loading onto the serials was performed in daylight, and even while movement to the marshalling area was going on, enemy reconnaissance kept up continuous observation over the serials moving by. The commandant's service was loosely organized. There was insufficient observance of concealment in preparing units for the operation, especially in repacking parachutes and delivering them to the loading airfields. As a result of a lack of concealment in preparations, and also due to a poorly organized air defense of the airfields, the enemy twice delivered air strikes against the airfields where transport aircraft and subunits of the landing force had concentrated.

For the purpose of ensuring concealment in the preparation of troops for the operation it is essential to keep the number of planners limited, issue fewer written instructions concerning the preparations, and give out primarily verbal instructions.

Personnel must be isolated from the local populace, both when moving to the marshalling area and while located therein. Strict measures of concealment of troops, combat equipment, and especially parachutes, must be observed. All movements by troops to the marshalling area are usually made only at night.

If the airborne operation is prepared and conducted secretly, then the true target of the landing force can remain unknown to the enemy until the very last minute, i.e. until the beginning of the landing. This, without doubt, will hinder him in taking more effective countermeasures, if not precluding them altogether.

Concealment of preparations is an important factor in achieving surprise in the employment of landing forces. One can say frankly that the surprise appearance of paratroopers in the enemy rear is half the success of the entire operation. But for this purpose one must properly choose the time and place for the landing, determine the composition and methods of action of the landing forces, mass secretly in the marshalling area, etc. Surprise is achieved only when the military transports made available deliver personnel and combat equipment simultaneously, i.e. in one trip.



There are no obstacles for parachutists in combat

The success of an airborne operation depends largely on organization of control.

In preparing for the Dnieper airborne operation, an attempt was made to set up a landing force staff so as to have an element which would unite the airborne brigades making the landing. The brigades were made into an airborne corps, the staff of which was formed hastily from officers of the Administration of Airborne Forces.

However, the experience of this airborne operation showed that such control was impracticable and unnecessary, since a link-up by units of the landing force with frontline troops was planned on the very first day after the landing, and the depth of the drop zone was not over 8-15 kilometers from the front line.

The corps commander, who had not only a weak staff and limited means of control, but also lacked reserves, could hardly have substantial influence on the course of combat operations of the brigades in this situation.

As the past war showed, success in employment of airborne landings depended largely not only on the offensive capabilities of frontline troops, but also on regular air support of the combat operations of airborne forces landed in the enemy rear.

In the past any airborne operation became a major air operation. For example, over 8,500 combat aircraft were used during a landing of two Anglo-American divisions on the Rhein in March 1945. The ratio of combat to transport aircraft in this operation was 4:2.

According to French data, combat aviation handled the following tasks:

Tasks	Fighters	Bombers
Accompanying transports and covering the drop zone	3042	--
Bombing strikes		
-- against air defenses	120	398
-- against airfields	--	1430
-- against populated points	--	260
-- against bridges and crossings	--	173
Air support to combat operations	1344	--
Aerial reconnaissance	439	--
Strikes to draw enemy forces from the drop zone	369	1163

The reservation should be made here that the Anglo-American command could only bring in such a mass of combat aviation to support one airborne operation, because essentially the aviation had no other targets or missions. One need only recall the situation of the Germans on the Western Front at the end of March 1945 and it will become clear that such massed air forces on a narrow sector of the front had more propaganda than military meaning. Today such a large number of combat aircraft is hardly needed to support the landing and combat operations of airborne forces.

This chapter examined only a few of the problems of organizing and conducting airborne operations from the experience of the past war, particularly those which are of interest and are instructive in present conditions.

Naturally, all conclusions from past experience can be valuable in our time only if we consider the changes in weaponry and outfitting of air-borne forces and military transport aircraft, and the changes in views of their combat employment, which took place in the postwar period, especially in recent years.

Chapter X

AIRBORNE LANDING FORCES -- AN IMPORTANT MEANS OF WARFARE

The preceding chapter covered some problems of the preparation and employment of airborne landing forces today. Now it remains to tell of the views on the question of the degree to which new types of weapons and combat equipment which have appeared in postwar years have influenced the principles of combat employment of airborne forces in modern warfare. What is the role and mission of these forces? Are they experiencing a crisis in connection with the appearance of nuclear missiles and other means of mass destruction?

Missions of the Airborne Forces

Development of theory and the experience of postwar exercises have shown that the role of airborne troops and the opportunities for their combat utilization in operations of ground forces and naval forces, as well as independently, have considerably increased.

It is the spatial nature and broad scope of modern warfare, as well as the different conditions of theaters of military operations, demanding the crossing of large water obstacles, mountainous regions, deserts, and other areas difficult of access, which determine, within the range of modern military transport aircraft, the advisability of making a full-scale landing of airborne forces in the enemy rear for carrying out various missions. If the attacker has at his disposal powerful airborne forces and military transport aircraft, there is a reduction in the effect of any natural obstacles and their protective characteristics on the conduct of modern operations.

There is an organic necessity for employing airborne landing forces to accomplish various missions having operational or strategic goals beyond natural barriers which are difficult of access or totally inaccessible for other combat arms, under conditions of diversity of theaters of military operations.

According to foreign military specialists, airborne forces are capable of destroying strategic objectives which cannot be disabled by nuclear missiles or aviation (for example, underground plants, storage areas, etc.).

They can take advantage of the results of mass nuclear or ordinary bombing strikes to seize vital enemy centers. They can create an airborne base of operations which could support the airlanding in the enemy rear of forces sufficient to capture the most important areas or an entire zone on enemy territory. They can invade a continent in coordination with amphibious forces, conduct special operations such as raids in the enemy rear to link up with naval landing forces or to assist them, and they can also operate in the interests of attacking forces.

Moreover, lately proposals have been made to make use of airborne forces to accomplish missions having a "military-political nature."¹ It is the opinion of Chateauneuf, the author of this proposal, that such forces must be employed to develop a broad "partisan" warfare and must become the basic nucleus for partisan detachments created from among the local populace. The combat operations of such elements would assume the nature of a slow, but continuous, "inundation" of the enemy rear. Then it will be possible to begin creation of "military-political bases," i.e. to begin occupying broad geographical regions. These theoretical propositions are basically those of American military specialists, and have found practical application, as we know, in countries of Southeast Asia and in many other areas of the world.

Chateauneuf writes that the employment of airborne forces operating in direct coordination with the main body of ground forces is most probable in the initial period of a nuclear war. Such forces will be employed mainly for the purpose of aiding those troops in striking a blow after atomic preparation, in breaking through enemy defenses, in supporting a rapid advance into the depth of enemy defenses, and in restoring defenses in areas which have been subjected to atomic strikes.

In addition to joint operations of airborne forces with ground forces, the independent actions of the former as a means of accomplishing important missions stemming from the nature of modern warfare will acquire more and more importance in the course of the war.

Forces of airborne and ground troops can be used to conduct independent airborne operations in the enemy's deep rear.

Chateauneuf, author of the article "Airborne forces in atomic warfare," writes that "strategic airborne operations by an airborne corps in the interests of a theater of military operations or a military coalition can be carried out only if the enemy's antiatomic defenses are put out of action. This can be achieved in the beginning of a war, when the enemy has not yet fully organized his ground and air defenses and is not at all capable of offering resistance to operations in the initial period having as their goal the capture of areas or strategic bases needed for further conduct of the war." He further states that in the course of the war one can hardly carry out to all practical purposes strategic airborne operations, such as in Western

¹See Revue militaire Générale, July 1953, pp. 203-219.

Europe, where both sides will have large atomic, missile, and air forces. At the same time, he directs the reader's attention to the broad possibilities for making use of airborne forces in "some areas of the Middle and Far East."¹

In major operations the airborne forces will be somewhat like the advance guard of troops moved by air to a base of operations captured by the parachutists.

As the war showed, the airborne forces can find the widest employment in offensive operations by operating to disrupt the work of the rear and the control of enemy troops.

We know that victory in combat depends largely on transport means, which provide the troops with everything essential for life and combat. If tanks, aircraft, numerous armored personnel carriers, and other equipment are without fuel and the artillery without ammunition, an offensive could hardly begin and hope to be successful. Airborne forces are most suitable to disrupt enemy supply lines and lines of communication. Such forces represent a means of vertical envelopment of the enemy, as the armored forces are a means of horizontal envelopment, i.e. over the terrain.

The enemy's transport columns, oil pipelines, and railroads, which stretch for many kilometers, can hardly be covered against all attacks for their entire extent. They are extremely vulnerable to surprise attacks of even small parachute elements. Such an attack will cause confusion and a crowding of transport on the roads, which are suitable for air and missile strikes.

Comparatively small parachute subunits which capture and destroy bridges, overpasses, road junctions, dams, and sluices can disrupt the timely supply of troops.

One of the forms of very effective employment of airborne troops in the attack is for the forcing of water obstacles and to assist in the landing of naval forces.

Airborne forces have special missions when the ground forces move in a pursuit. Airborne landing forces are an ideal means to overtake a highly mobile retreating enemy and capture important points before he has a chance to arrive. In blocking retreating enemy units from the rear, there is special importance in obstructing defiles, which include not only passes in the valleys and mountains, but also road junctions and bridges across which the retreating forces must pass. If the one who is pursuing succeeds in capturing such key points before the retreating enemy arrives, he can channel the retreat into the most favorable place or can force the enemy to accept combat. This could end in total defeat for the enemy.

¹See Revue militaire Générale, July 1958, pp. 213-219.

It is advisable to refer to an example of the use of tactical airborne landing forces only 5 years after the end of World War II.

In October 1950, during the war in Korea, the American command made a drop in the vicinity of Syukusen, Eydzyu, and Dzyunsen, 45 kilometers from the front line. The airborne landing force was made up of the 187th Airborne Regiment. It had the mission of cutting the lines of communication of the Korean People's Army, which was moving from the north and northeast toward Pyongyang. They thus closed the routes of withdrawal of the Pyongyang grouping of Korean forces. Further, the landing force was to hold the captured area until the arrival of the main body, and in coordination with it, to destroy the units of the Korean People's Army withdrawing to the north and capture its Headquarters, which, according to information the Americans had, was located in the vicinity of Dzyunsen /placenames in this paragraph transliterated from the Russian/.



American paratroopers during maneuvers in Panama

According to the landing plan, the drop was to be at 0800 hours on 20 October, but due to unfavorable weather conditions it took place only in the latter half of the day.

For the first time under combat conditions the Americans dropped by parachute heavy weapons and equipment — 105-mm howitzers and $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton and $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton vehicles. In connection with the fact that the main forces of the Korean People's Army on this axis had been moved aside, the force's operations were limited to fighting small battles with Korean rear guard elements. By the end of the second day, subunits of the airborne regiment had linked up with the main body of attacking forces.

Several months later, in the fighting for Seoul, the Americans again employed the 187th Airborne Regiment. A landing was made 25 kilometers from the front line and continued through 23 and 24 March. The paratroopers had the mission of delaying the retreating troops of the Korean People's Army, but when the drop was made (0900 hours on 23 March) the main body of the Koreans had withdrawn and the landing force had only to wage small battles with individual groups of Koreans covering the withdrawal. Nine to ten hours after completion of the drop, advance elements of troops advancing from the front moved into the area of combat operations of the paratroopers.

Airborne forces landed in small detachments to the immediate rear of withdrawing troops can, if employed skillfully, speed the enemy's destruction by surprise attacks and disrupt any attempts to bring the disorganized units into order or to restore the situation after a defeat.

Airborne forces can also be utilized on the defense. It is proper here to recall the case where the 10th and 201st airborne brigades were employed in the vicinity of Orel and Mtsensk. At the beginning of October 1941 they covered a break in our defenses until the arrival of 1st Guards Rifle Corps.

When various reconnaissance groups and airborne elements are operating over a broad area in the enemy rear, they can carry out the most varied missions. Here much depends on the training and bravery of each individual airborne trooper and the capabilities of his commanders. Quality of training is sometimes more important than the number of participants, which might even interfere with attaining the effect of surprise in tactical landings.

Even surprise air or missile strikes are not really effective if they are not tied in with the actions of attacking or defending forces. Small groups of paratroopers can give substantial assistance to ground forces and inflict heavy losses on the enemy by blowing up bridges, sluices, oil pipelines, and overpasses, by attacking separate points occupied by the enemy, by cutting lines of communication, including lines of signal communication, by designating targets for nuclear missile strikes, and by acting in coordination with other forms of reconnaissance.

It must also be recalled that airborne forces in reserve represent a constant threat for the enemy and force him to keep a unit in the rear to combat airborne landings. This undoubtedly leads to a dispersal of enemy forces and a reduction of his combat might in a theater of military operations.

Airborne forces have a special purpose, and so it is not recommended that they be employed to carry out those missions which can be handled by conventional ground forces. Here one must take account of the fact that material, technical, and combat support to airborne operations is much more difficult and costly than for conventional operations.¹

These are some of the basic missions which airborne forces are able to accomplish today. It is impossible to give some kind of complete list

¹See Military Review, November 1959, p. 8.

of these missions, for the tactics and attack objectives of landing forces are quite varied, since air space is not connected tactically with anything else. During a landing in the enemy rear where there are many objectives, there is always a moment of surprise and of deception for the purpose of leading the enemy astray as to the landing zone of the airborne force.

Thus the range of missions which can be accomplished by airborne forces is quite broad. It encompasses actions of an operational-strategic nature involving the use of all types of modern weapons, and small tactical, reconnaissance-diversionary actions.

As the war experience showed, the basis for success in employment of airborne landing forces was the surprise achieved by their appearance in the enemy rear. This was a result of great mobility thanks to the use of military transport aviation. But as soon as the parachutists landed they lost these positive qualities and became relatively fixed and nonmobile at the most critical moment in the accomplishment of their assigned combat mission.

The foreign press reports that the problem of ensuring high mobility in airborne forces on the battlefield will be fully solved in the near future. Small airborne units can even now be fully mobile, and soon we can expect to see armored airborne units and large units.

An article written by a group of French airborne officers and entitled "Mobility of Airborne Forces on the Battlefield," examines in some detail the paths to solution of this problem.¹

Above all, it stresses the relationship of tactical mobility of airborne subunits to the speed of movement of airborne troops on foot and to the capabilities of the transportation means at their disposal after landing. This may be vehicles which are dropped by parachute or airlanded, or they may be vehicles obtained by the troops on the spot.

The authors of the article believe that the rate of movement of a paratrooper on foot can be increased by decreasing the weight of his personal weapons and portable equipment. Another way is to produce new models of collapsible weaponry which can be dropped in lighter bundles with the personnel and can be easily carried on the back. Still another solution is to develop simple and light auxiliary hand carts for supplies, which could be carried or moved by one person in crossing water obstacles and other barriers.

However, no matter what achievements are made in technology in this field, the rate of movement of a parachutist on foot can be increased only to certain limits as determined by a person's physical capabilities.

Consequently the conclusion suggests itself that a solution to the problem of increasing the tactical mobility of airborne troops on the

¹ See L'Armée, December 1954, p. 42.

battlefield must be sought in the outfitting of airborne subunits with highly mobile mechanical transportation equipment.

The authors of the above article also place certain tactical and technical requirements on the airborne troops' means of transportation.

Taking account of the conditions under which airborne units will have to operate, they believe that transportation means should be characterized in the following way:

- have a simple design and provide for concealed movement of troops over any terrain; have increased load capacity and the capability of using a trailer;

- be adapted by weight and size for air drops, and also have sufficient durability for landing by parachute;

- and finally, the airborne means of transportation must be universal so as to transport personnel, radio equipment, weapons, and supplies.

Modern landing technology, the capability of aircraft to transport and drop heavy cargoes, and the possibility of landing aircraft on unprepared fields permit airborne troops to be outfitted with armored personnel carriers and cross-country vehicles, tanks and self-propelled artillery pieces. This makes them highly mobile and maneuverable on the battlefield after a landing in the enemy rear.

All this makes it possible to have airborne forces who can be fully landed in the enemy rear to conduct successful combat operations until the arrival of ground forces, and primarily armored large units, from the front into the drop zone. With the tactical mobility on the battlefield of armored forces and the strategic surprise of airborne forces, they comprise, according to foreign military theoreticians, a natural combat group for the conduct of modern offensive operations.

In confirmation of the ever growing role and capabilities of airborne forces in future warfare, the foreign military press has cited data on a reorganization of these forces conducted for the purpose of strengthening their firepower and increasing their mobility and maneuverability on the battlefield. Airborne large units are receiving not only conventional weapons for their arsenal, but also nuclear missiles and rather powerful means of antitank and air defense. For example, the U.S. 82nd and 101st airborne divisions, which were reorganized in 1956, each represent a "fire brigade" armed with atomic weapons for the purpose of putting a quick end to small wars. According to one of the leaders in the U.S. Army, divisions with the new organization are mechanized large units which embody the most modern views of military science. In wartime they will be able to "land on target, accomplish their missions, and fly away like a swarm of wasps."

One American military theoretician wrote: "In the final account, national policy cannot be sufficiently supported just by intercontinental missiles or other means of strategic firepower, especially in limited wars. We must be ready to employ ground forces at any point of the globe."¹

Thus, American military theoreticians believe that airborne forces will not only retain their importance, but in many instances will be the sole force capable of accomplishing certain missions in a nuclear war.

Methods of employing military transport aviation must also develop in parallel with the development of the theory and practice of employment of airborne forces. Both elements must unite their efforts in resolving all problems of their joint combat employment, so as to preserve for themselves that important role given them in various conditions of modern nuclear warfare.

believe that the success of airborne landing forces depends not only on a sufficient number of the necessary men and materiel, but also on the thoroughness of the preparations and support, and on the completeness of consideration of the peculiarities of such an operation.

These peculiarities arise primarily from the fact that, being in isolation from advancing forces, the airborne landing force cannot always count on their support at various points in time during combat operations. Moreover, the landing force will always have extremely limited time periods set aside for organization of control after being dropped or airdropped.

The actions of landing forces placed in the enemy rear take place under tense and rapidly changing conditions, requiring continuous support, especially by aviation, artillery, and missiles. In addition, the very landing makes it necessary to have a large number of transport aircraft. A considerable expenditure of combat aviation and other means of suppression is required to penetrate the enemy's front of air defense in the zone through which the landing force flies and for air cover during the flight.

There may be unexpected happenings in an airborne operation to a greater degree than in any other operation, because to a considerable extent it is "a jump into the unknown." However, the attendant risk may be reduced by efficient preparations which take account of all possible unforeseen circumstances. Such preparations must be thorough and comprehensive. Inasmuch as operations by ground or naval forces are planned ahead of time, the task of the airborne force must also be determined ahead of time, so that the commander of the landing force can make the appropriate decision and purposefully prepare his men and weapons.

On the whole the employment of airborne landing forces represents a rather complex set of combat activities by the participating troops. Therefore such an operation requires especially precise control and coordination among airborne troops, transport and combat aviation, ground, missile, and

¹Military Review, November 1959, p. 25.

naval forces. The preparation, comprehensive support, and accomplishment of such an operation must take place under the direction of strictly determined command levels which have sufficient men and materiel for this purpose.

Planning for the use of landing forces requires an exceptionally high degree of operational foresight, since it is necessary to consider the enemy's probable measures of resistance, as well as the factors of time, weather, microrelief of the drop zone, and many others. The key to accomplishing the mission lies in landing sufficiently strong forces at the proper time and against a correctly chosen objective.¹

Airborne Landing Forces and New Weapons

Nuclear missiles influence the employment of airborne landing forces in modern warfare, but do they create the threat of destruction or offer assistance to such forces?

Foreign military thinking expresses basically two points of view on the future of airborne forces. Adherents of one side refer to the experience of the past war in attempting to prove that airborne forces are experiencing a crisis and that their use in a future war is not very probable. In addition, they state that the appearance of new weapons and new equipment such as nuclear weapons, all-weather fighters, missiles, and the high mobility of enemy ground forces could create exceptionally difficult conditions for the employment of airborne forces. In their opinion, they would be in an extremely dangerous situation while flying to the objective area. After landing, the forces would become relatively immobile, and as a result could be a lucrative target for a nuclear strike or would be destroyed by mobile enemy armored units before the landing force could bring itself up to combat readiness.

Adherents of the second point of view express the exactly opposite opinion on the role and importance of airborne troops in modern warfare.²

They say that to maintain today that a future war can be conducted and won only through use of nuclear weapons will hardly be reasonable. The rapidity with which ground forces will operate will be of great importance in developing or consolidating the success of a nuclear preparation. This can be done best of all by airborne forces.

Foreign theoreticians state that the bold and proper use of airborne forces to consolidate the success of nuclear preparation is fully justified and necessary from the viewpoint of military art. Moreover, well organized nuclear support to the actions of an airborne force considerably strengthens

¹See Military Review, November 1959. An editorial note states that the article corresponds to views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.

²See Wehrkunde, 1956, No. 5, pp. 234-237.

that force. This also makes possible a bolder operation in comparison with the past war, when the actions of airborne forces were limited due to a lack of strong support.

From the very onset of a war there will be a struggle to capture important areas, objectives, and positions. Airborne forces will be most suitable to capture these key positions because their mobility is considerably greater than that of ground forces or naval landing forces. The airborne force does not require specially equipped airfields or support subunits in the drop zone. It will have a freedom of choice of a drop zone in accordance with the assigned mission and possible enemy resistance. Swiftess and surprise are decisive factors in such operations, and these are advantages of the airborne forces.

Foreign military thinking affirms that large-scale airborne operations can be conducted only if the required degree of aerial superiority has been won. In this instance an airborne operation can be successful without excessive losses. The degree of aerial superiority will vary depending on the depth to which the drop is made,¹ the duration of the operation, and the number of participating troops.

Winning aerial superiority and suppressing the enemy's air defenses for the airborne landing force is a complex but fully solvable problem, according to the author of an article entitled "Airborne Operations. Mobility for the Nuclear Age."²

At the same time it must be admitted that total superiority in the air can rarely be achieved, since this requires the destruction of all enemy air craft, all surface-to-air guided missiles, all surface-to-air missiles, and all antiaircraft artillery. Winning the necessary degree of aerial superiority means that conditions are created in which the enemy is limited in choice of the means of delivering nuclear weapons before the drop is made. In addition, the airborne force requires greater time after landing to undertake responsive actions. To take advantage of these conditions it is necessary that all airborne troops operate rapidly both while enplaning and loading combat equipment on aircraft, and during the flight and drop in the objective area.

If conditions are created in which the enemy cannot deliver a nuclear strike in a short time after the landing of an airborne force, then the force will have the opportunity to assemble and bring itself into combat readiness, to capture the drop zone and necessary objectives therein, and it will also have time to prepare the captured area for defense. The more time needed by the enemy to employ a nuclear weapon against the airborne force, the less effect it will have.

¹See Military Review, February 1960, p. 92.

²See Military Review, November 1959, p. 8.

Another factor in reducing the effectiveness of an enemy nuclear strike against the airborne force and ensuring its success on the ground is concealment of preparations and surprise in employment of the landing. One of the main goals of the work of staffs and commanders in preparing for the airborne operation is to deny the enemy the opportunity to determine the location of the troops designated for the landing and of the airfields basing the military transport aircraft in the marshalling area. A part of this goal also includes keeping from the enemy the drop site, time of landing, composition, and forces taking part.

The maneuverability and large radius of operation of military transport aviation permit preparing for the landing in areas dispersed over a large area, at a considerable distance from the front line. This undoubtedly creates additional difficulties for the enemy in employing nuclear weapons against the landing preparations.

Thus the foreign adherents of a broad use of airborne landing forces come to the conclusion that in preparing for an operation the airborne forces will not need special support if only aerial superiority has been won and all steps have been taken for combat support and atomic defense.

According to Maj G. Schacht, author of the article "Is There a Crisis for the Airborne Forces?" it becomes doubtful under these very conditions that the enemy will be able to employ nuclear weapons against the airborne landing force during its flight to the drop zone. In this instance such employment would be difficult of accomplishment even from a purely technical point of view, since the aircraft would fly along unknown paths, unexpectedly, at low altitudes, and with considerable speed.

After taking off from several airfields, the military transports would continue to operate in small groups, staggered in time and following different flight paths. To avoid radar detection they could fly at low altitude or take advantage of nighttime conditions or periods of limited visibility. Thanks to this, the airborne troops could be delivered to the objective area with relative security, and in addition would have the element of surprise — the basic condition for success in landing.¹

Maj G. Schacht writes that nuclear weapons represent the greatest threat for the airborne force during the landing and in the course of its combat operations, since the enemy has the possibility of a wide choice in means of nuclear attack. It is easier for the enemy to reconnoiter after the landing of a force, and he requires fewer nuclear weapons to destroy the force in the drop zone than in striking against the marshalling area.

However, in spite of the considerable threat of employment of nuclear weapons against the objective area of the airborne force, the latter has certain advantages in defense against such weapons in comparison to the troops breaking through the defense from the front. Airborne units usually

¹See Wehrkunde, 1956, No. 5, pp. 234-237.

land on scattered points and attack widely scattered objectives, thus achieving dispersal of the units.

Of great importance for airborne landing forces after a drop into the enemy rear is swiftness of actions immediately after landing. This wins time to conduct defensive work and to take steps for atomic protection before the enemy begins to employ nuclear weapons.

The ground actions of an airborne force are usually not involved with the prolonged retention of an objective or position. If they were, the force would be a lucrative target for delivery of a nuclear strike. The actions by airborne troops consist of delivering strikes against the enemy during a specific period of time and over a certain area. Within these time and space limitations, the landing force can operate independently and with initiative, employing varied combat techniques. In this instance it can be invulnerable for nuclear weapons and can achieve a temporary superiority over the enemy on a particular sector.

Everything that has been said about the effect of nuclear weapons on the conduct of airborne operations leads military theoreticians to the following conclusion — nuclear weapons represent the greatest threat to an airborne force after landing. However, the dispersal and maneuverable nature in conducting combat operations will be an important factor in reducing losses in case such weapons are employed against the landing force.¹

Thus a majority of U.S. and West German military specialists agree that in future warfare the role of airborne troops will not only not be reduced, but will considerably increase. In answering the question of one American magazine concerning the role of airborne troops, former U.S. Army Chief of Staff Gen Taylor stated: "We need airborne troops to exploit long range atomic weapons. There is no sense to employ such weapons if the results cannot be exploited by ground forces. We can imagine the effect which atomic weapons will have on the morale of the enemy, and we must have troops which can be quickly moved to enemy territory and prevent the enemy from restoring his situation. Therefore airborne forces are the weapon of victory. They are the foundation of our own security and represent the greatest hope for international security."²

Are airborne forces the only combat arm which can be used for airborne landings at the present level of development of air transport?

American specialists believe that they are not. The airborne forces are gradually, but quite noticeably, losing that monopoly. There is no doubt that in the near future the parachute will be regarded as was the legendary machine gun tachanka of Civil War times.

¹See Military Review, November 1959, pp. 4-9.

²L'Armée — La Nation, January 1958, p. 31.

Helicopters with a large load capacity and range, VTOL aircraft, ion-powered craft [ekranoplany i ekranolety] -- those not requiring an airfield -- will crowd out the parachute as a means of landing men, cargoes, and combat equipment.

This is why the ground forces of the leading capitalist countries are becoming more and more airmobile every year, capable not only of making an air movement, but also of participating as airborne landing forces with any type of goals.

In connection with the rapid development of air transports, there is now a need for special airborne training of personnel, commanders, and staffs, not only of airborne forces, but of ground forces as well.

Airborne Training of Troops

During World War II the air space was frequently used not only for combat aviation and landing of parachute forces, but also for moving various cargoes and ordinary ground forces. And although at that time there was an extremely limited number of means for landing and air movement, experience showed that troops moved by air considerably increased the striking force and maneuverability of ground forces. With their bold and decisive actions, such troops aided in attaining the goals of offensive operations, inasmuch as they combined speed and maneuverability of military transport aviation with the ability of ground forces to capture and hold terrain.

A study of the experience of the past and trends in development of means and methods of combat in postwar years shows that the combat operations of ground forces in a future war will take on a clearly defined ground and air character. Operations involving use of the air space will become of larger scale and considerably more varied in their content than in the past.

As we know, considerable changes took place in postwar years both in development of military equipment and in views on its employment in a nuclear missile war. Now the main task of military art is, according to many military theoreticians of a number of countries, to create the proper ratio between firepower and troop mobility, i.e. to form armed forces whose mobility will correspond to the firepower of missiles and nuclear weapons.

In this regard, all armies of leading capitalist countries are conducting much research and experimentation in the field of complex employment of nuclear weapons and missiles and air transports. The latter are frequently viewed as an important operational and strategic counterbalance to the former. Transport aircraft are used to ensure high mobility of troops, rapid concentration and dispersal, and continuous material-technical support in full accordance with the demands of a nuclear missile war. If air movement becomes a conventional means of movement for ground forces, then according to military specialists there will be a decrease in the gap between their increased firepower and mobility, since the actions of air transports cannot be affected by bad roads, destroyed bridges, swamps, forests, or zones of radioactive contamination. Under these conditions, air movements will

become the most reliable, and sometimes the only means for transporting men and supplies.

Much attention is devoted in the armies of the United States, England, France, and West Germany to increasing the numbers of air transports and other means of air transportation with the aim of creating the most favorable conditions for development of air movements.

Foreign military specialists also foresee the use of aircraft of the civil air fleet, chiefly to transport men and cargoes within the country and between theaters of military operations. At the same time they believe that if a nuclear missile war breaks out suddenly, they will have to count on that military transport aviation which is in working order at that time.

They aver that that aviation which is ready for immediate action can be a decisive factor in a nuclear missile war. The aid from civil aviation could be too late, limited in load capacity, and not appropriate for military needs.¹

The broad employment of air transport means in the interests of ground forces will allow them to develop combat operations unexpectedly in any zone and over a broad area, with swift delivery by air of men, weapons, and transport. In other words, the air space above the enemy defenses and above his territory can be widely used for maneuvering troops and conducting combat operations.

Here we have in mind that light aircraft, helicopters, and rotorcraft flying over broken terrain at low altitudes and having the capability of landing in any spot are much less vulnerable to fighters than columns of transport vehicles. Therefore one could assume that in the already near future air transport means will replace and will carry out many tasks of wheeled or tracked transport and will occupy an important place among the transportation means of ground forces of foreign armies.

It is maintained in the foreign military press that military transport aviation will have an influence also on the organization of the rear in combat and in an operation, since it is difficult to imagine that in today's operations, as in the past, cumbersome transport columns of rear service agencies will be able to follow after advancing troops. It is recommended that we also keep in mind the circumstance that military transport aviation cannot handle the various packing necessary for air transport of supplies, military equipment, and weapons for all branches of the armed services and the combat arms. A certain amount of cargo packaging, mooring equipment, and other airborne equipment must be prepared ahead of time and kept in constant readiness.

Military leaders of some foreign armies raise the question of creating their own army transport aviation within the ground forces. For

¹See Interavia, February 1957, pp. 102-107.

example, in one of his speeches before Congress, former Army Chief of Staff Gen Taylor stated:

"We would like to have organic aviation in the ground forces to support troop mobility on the battlefield. It is necessary in order to move personnel, equipment, and supplies to different points across vast areas of combat operations...

We require aircraft which operate from small airfields. This is necessary to ensure that air units are in the immediate vicinity of ground force units."¹ As we know, this problem has been settled to a certain extent in the U.S. Army: elements of Army transport aviation (airplanes and helicopters) are part of the field army.

Finally, attention is directed to the statements of a number of military specialists that, in connection with the ever growing capabilities of military transport aviation to take off and land on limited and unequipped field strips, it is not only the airborne troops which are suitable for employment in major airborne landing forces. Now units and large units of ground forces will be widely used as such forces. This is also required by the large scope of armed warfare, in which the use of only airborne forces will be insufficient to accomplish all missions which are to be carried out by airborne landing forces or with their help. With an increase in the number and an improvement in quality of air transportation, the air offensive will take on ever greater scope. Even now conventional ground forces can be used independently for these purposes with almost all their combat equipment and weapons.

At the same time it is not recommended to unnecessarily load down units and large units with those weapons which are not very frequently used in combat. It is obviously inadvisable, so they say, to give units and large units designated for air movement or for use as an airborne landing force those weapons and transport means which they will need only temporarily or for operations under special conditions. It is advantageous to concentrate such weapons in the hands of the higher commander, which will allow for economy and more effective use of the men and material in aviation.

Lately the foreign press has been discussing more frequently the question of increasing the battlefield mobility of ground forces and the role which army aviation can play in this field. For example, the author of the article "Air Mobility of Ground Forces: An Idea, An Illusion, Or Future Concept?" examines this problem rather fully in an analysis of the criminal war in Vietnam. He attempts to generalize the basic missions which are being carried out at present and which can be given to army aviation in the future as ground forces carry on combat operations both with and without the use of nuclear weapons. In the author's opinion, the outfitting of ground forces

¹L'Armée — La Nation, January 1958, pp. 13-14.

with appropriate helicopters and aircraft is a deciding factor in increasing their mobility, and, from his point of view, can become one of the main trends in further building up the Bundeswehr.¹

These same points are expressed in a number of articles by American, French, Swiss, and other military observers.

Inasmuch as the air movement of troops and use of airborne landing forces in a modern nuclear missile war are assumed to take on a mass nature, the need has arisen to devote serious attention to the conduct of specialized airborne training of ground force units and large units, and to the planned and systematic training of commanders, combined-arms staffs, and rear service elements.

The basic aim of specialized airborne training of units and large units which can be employed as airborne landing forces or for air movement is to teach them the use of air transportation for movement to an area of combat operations or to a new concentration area. In this instance the combat training of troops is not much different from ordinary troop training, except for teaching personnel to prepare combat equipment for air movement according to the requirements of flight safety, training personnel in loading heavy equipment in aircraft, and in enplaning, deplaning, and assembly of personnel after landing. Moreover, personnel must become familiar with the tactical actions of airborne forces in the enemy rear and must gain the requisite skills in using landing equipment on board the transports.²

All personnel transported by air are also obliged to have a good knowledge of the rules of behavior in an aircraft in flight and the procedures under special conditions. In flights at high altitudes they must know the procedures for using oxygen equipment in unsealed cabins.

Officers receive training in the fundamentals of organizing and conducting airborne operations involving ground forces, in compiling the necessary calculations and tables for the landing and variations for loading the air transports, and they acquire skills in directing the loading, mooring, and unloading of heavy equipment and basic combat supplies. As a result of this training all officers are obliged to have a good idea of the troop operations in the marshalling area and on departure and loading airfields, since regardless of whether or not troops take part in an air movement over their territory or over the enemy, they must be in constant readiness to enter battle immediately after landing.

In making calculations for the movement, it is recommended that one definitely take account of the fact that the load capacity of an airplane or helicopter changes in relationship to the altitude and distance of flight, temperature and humidity of the air, amount of fuel, size and weight of the cargo, and technical status of each aircraft used in the movement. Therefore

¹See Kampftruppen, December 1966, pp. 179-182.

²See Air University Review, July-August 1964, p. 75.

it is required that commanders and staffs of units transported by air plan the movement with exceptional thoroughness so as to have with them the minimum amount of weapons needed to accomplish the assigned mission with an economic expenditure of air transports available.

The experience of airborne training of ground forces of some foreign armies shows that successful training of personnel in a short time is attained if officers of airborne forces and military transport aviation are brought in, and if air transport means (airplanes, helicopters) or their mock-ups are available for training. If conditions are favorable for the training, i.e. if there are air transport means or their mock-ups available and if there is a well trained staff of instructors, then any unit of the ground forces can be trained in air movements within a period of time not exceeding that spent in training for movement by any other form of transport — sea, rail, or motor vehicle. Consequently, according to foreign military specialists, it is fully possible under present conditions to train all ground forces to use air transport means to the same extent as they are trained in movements by conventional means of transportation. This presumes the inclusion of airborne training in ground force training programs as a specialized discipline.

To work out in practice the main problems of loading and unloading, it is recommended that ground force units have training camps for landing operations and ensure the periodic training of personnel. Personnel training and practical accomplishment of techniques of loading and unloading from airplanes and helicopters present no difficulties, since the men are billeted in previously equipped landing places.

Loading heavy equipment and weapons on aircraft also takes place quickly if crews and loading teams are trained, the places for concentration of cargoes are properly chosen, loading equipment is available, etc. At the same time, more time is sometimes lost on unskilled organization of loading than on the entire air movement.

The speed at which aircraft are loaded reflects not only on the duration of their stay at the airfield, but also on their turn-around time, i.e. on the number of consecutive trips.

However, in taking all possible steps to speed up the loading of aircraft, it is necessary to take account of rules which have less importance in other forms of transportation: observation of the center of gravity, or, as they say, balancing of the aircraft during loading and in flight.

While combat aircraft such as fighters and bombers have predetermined places for mounting guns, missiles, and other objects comprising a useful load and the position of their centers of gravity is determined within certain limits (which is generally true also of military transports which move personnel), the problems of loading are enormously more complex when they carry cargoes not only because the cargo is frequently mixed, but also because the size of the cargo compartment permits placing the cargoes in various positions and variations. Therefore it is quite possible that the cargo is dis-

tributed so that the position of the center of gravity exceeds allowable limits. This will delay the flight, since such a case is not permissible and will require reloading. This is why it is necessary to know the size and weight of equipment (cargoes) and skillfully place it in the cargo compartment in strict accordance with instructions of the aircraft crew.

The combat experience of the U.S. Army in Vietnam shows that particular attention there is devoted to loading the first serials of transport aircraft, which move the advance elements of the airborne landing force or of troops moved by air. Much importance is also attached to thorough organization in the deplaning of personnel and unloading of aircraft. Much is provided for ahead of time while preparing for the air movement. For example, during preparations of troops and the loading of aircraft there is an inevitable splitting up of subunits on aircraft. This hinders the rapid assembly of personnel after landing and makes it difficult for them to become ready for combat. Therefore there is not only order in loading the aircraft, but also signals for assembly of personnel of subunits after unloading.

It is recommended that units moved in the first air serial contain subunits of various combat arms and services, and that the composition of subunits landed at each given moment correspond to the demands of the initial minutes of combat.

Finally, it is not recommended that the commander and his staff be placed in one or two aircraft along with means of control. They must be dispersed throughout the air column, each in readiness to take on himself the control of troops immediately after landing, if necessary.

In connection with the great scope of proposed future air movements, which will be continuous rather than episodic in a nuclear missile war, armies of the major foreign states are taking a number of specific steps directed toward improving training of officers and staffs and organization of centralized control of air movements.

Success in accomplishing air movements will depend not only on the availability of air transport means and a knowledge of the techniques of loading, but will also largely depend on skilled planning and organization of precise control on the part of combined-arms and air staffs.

Experience of the major landing operations using air transport means conducted in recent years by many countries shows that all combined-arms staffs are usually prepared ahead of time to handle questions dealing with air movements.

Such a use of combined-arms staffs presumes their constant preparations even in peacetime on questions of planning, organizing and conducting air movements and airborne operations, both jointly with airborne forces and independently, but definitely with the participation of staffs of military transport aviation.

These are some of the questions of training officers and staffs for air movements and for participation of ground forces as airborne landing forces. As the experience of the war shows, as well as the practice of numerous air movements of troops and cargoes after the war, they can be accomplished successfully only with a centralized control. Centralized control of air movements permits fullest utilization of military transport aviation in combination with other forms of transportation.

In January 1966, in connection with the transformation of the American Military Air Transport Service (MATs) from an auxiliary service into a basic operational command, the Military Airlift Command (MAC) was formed.

MAC is responsible for planning and carrying out strategic air transport movements for all branches of the Armed Forces in peace and war, for mobilization training and leasing aircraft of civilian commercial air companies for use by MAC, for direction of technical services, and also for keeping in operation the intermediate air bases along routes connecting the continental United States with Europe and Asia. The Commander of MAC is operationally subordinated directly to the Committee of the Chiefs of Staff.

MAC includes Twenty-First and Twenty-Second Transport Air Armies and specialized transport air wings.

At the end of 1966 MAC had over 90,000 men and over 1,000 aircraft of various types, including 600 heavy aircraft. In addition, 230 aircraft and 48,000 men are attached to MAC from the Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard, and around 350 transports are available from the civil air reserve.

MAC has 59 U.S. Air Force bases located in 41 countries and the United States.¹

At the beginning of 1966 the number of American military transports based in Vietnam comprised 500 transport and auxiliary aircraft and around 1,000 helicopters. All units and large units of American military transport aviation in Vietnam are operationally subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief of U.S. Forces in the Pacific through the Air Force Commander in this zone. It is organizationally part of the U.S. Fifth and Seventh Air Force based in the Pacific.

These forces are responsible for moving men, ammunition, and supplies within South Vietnam and for evacuation of wounded. In addition, around 300 heavy transports are fully occupied with moving troops and supplies directly from the United States to South Vietnam. They comprise the Twenty-Second Air Army of the Military Air Transport Command.

The 375th Medical Transport Wing moves wounded from South Vietnam to the United States. It has aircraft which are specially equipped for such moves.

¹See Interavia, December 1966, pp. 1876-1880.

The remaining military transport aircraft and helicopters are part of Army Aviation units and subunits, which in South Vietnam, in addition to purely transport operations, carry out a broad range of missions connected with landing tactical forces and diversionary groups, liaison, and laying communications lines in difficult terrain.

In line with the increase in scope of air movements caused by an expansion of American aggression, aircraft of civil aviation were placed in service along with military. By the middle of 1966, civil aircraft moved an average of 80,000 passengers and 5,700 tons of cargo per month from the United States to Southeast Asia.

The U.S. Department of Defense is devoting much attention to creating air means for making mass air movements, and is constantly taking steps designed to improve the organization of ground forces and the most rational utilization of air means. In addition, the Pentagon annually trains its troops and aviation in long-range air movements, for example from the United States to Japan and Western Europe, to Asia or Africa. The intervention of American forces in South Vietnam, in the Dominican Republic, and in other areas of the world was accomplished both from the sea and the air.

Efforts by the U.S. military leaders in training airborne troops and in providing training in landing operations in general to their armed forces was particularly evident during the crisis in the Caribbean. As is known, it was planned to invade Cuba using forces of the American Army and Navy. The fact that 40 percent of the ground forces were composed of troops trained in air movements: 82nd and 101st Airborne, 2nd Infantry, and 1st Armored divisions.

At the end of October 1963 the Americans conducted the widely advertised Operation Big Lift, during which around 15,000 men, personnel of 2nd Armored Division, and a strike group of tactical aviation were moved overseas to the FRG.

At the end of January and beginning of February 1964 a new military demonstration took place. This time it was the Pacific and Far Eastern theaters which were chosen. The 2nd Brigade of 25th Infantry Division was moved from Hawaii and the Philippines to Okinawa. In the latter half of February the Americans made another move of a combat group (1,500 men) from Texas to West Germany.

These demonstrations had the purpose of interfering with a reduction in international tension and keeping the partners in various aggressive blocs in subjugation and fear. On the whole, the moves of major contingents of American troops by air, which have become more frequent, are a check of the readiness to carry out in practice a number of the Pentagon's aggressive plans.

In accordance with these plans, a strategic Army corps was formed in the United States as part of the ground forces. Units and large units of

this corps are in a state of constant readiness for rapid moves to any spot on the globe and are maintained as a "deterrent force." According to the American magazine Military Review, "we are able to mass airborne troops in the morning anywhere on the territory of the United States and by the next morning deliver them to any remote, but strategically important, area of the globe."¹

In conclusion, one can draw the conclusion that the U.S. Army, like other armies of the capitalist countries, has moved in questions of increasing the mobility of its ground forces from research and experimentation to broad practical introduction of various air transport means into the troops. In striving to bring the organization and tactics of its Army into line with modern demands, the U.S. Army leaders are equipping units and large units of ground forces with mobile ground and air transportation and small-size, light weapons and combat equipment. Airborne training of ground forces is becoming an inalienable part of training of personnel, officers, and staffs.

¹Military Review, February 1960, p. 41.

Chapter XI

MIGHTY WINGS OF THE AIRBORNE FORCE

In spite of the appearance of missiles and nuclear weapons, bringing with them a change in the views of conducting a war and operations on the land, sea, and in the air, airborne troops have not lost their importance. On the contrary, they are continuing to develop. Even the small armies of countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa have organized units and large units of parachutists in recent years. The stimulus to this was undoubtedly the rapid development of air transport means and airborne technology, particularly over the last 10-15 years.

What technical capabilities do modern armies have to carry out airborne operations and mass movements of troops by air?

Military Transport Aircraft

As we know, World War II gave a certain impetus to the development of military transport aviation, which provided for the conduct of airborne operations, the rapid movement of personnel, combat equipment, and ground force supplies, and also the evacuation of the sick and wounded. Special military transport aircraft appeared in many countries of the world only 15-20 years ago. Before this, both here and abroad the air movement of troops, including airborne forces, was accomplished by aircraft reequipped from civilian aircraft or from outmoded types of bombers.

For example, through the history of our airborne forces the following have been used as transport aircraft: R-5, TB-1, TB-3, PS-84, Li-2, Tu-2, Tu-4, Tu-16, Il-12, Il-14, and Il-28. Only in postwar years were special transport-landing aircraft of the An-12 type and others used.

In spite of all attempts to create narrowly specialized transport aircraft, for example, tankers for carrying fuel or aircraft for carrying only personnel, considerations of economy and rational utilization still compel the production of multipurpose aircraft. It is quite natural that designers strive to prevent a considerable overstating of the weight of the

aircraft for the sake of some one of these goals, so as not to lower its effectiveness.

Military transport aircraft may be broken down into the following types, according to their combat purpose:

heavy transports, which are used to relocate air force units or to move troops and supplies of other branches of the armed forces over great distances, for example, from the United States to Europe, Japan, and other areas. Such aircraft include the American heavy transports C-130E, C-141, C-133A and C-133B, Boeing 707, Douglas DC-8, and others;

medium (assault) transports, such as the American C-123, C-124, and C-130A. They are employed for airborne operations and for moving cargo in zones in which they might be subjected to hostile action on the part of the enemy.

Light, or Army transports and helicopters of various types and designations are available in many foreign armies.

Depending on their purposes, the two basic types -- heavy and medium military transports -- have a specially designed fuselage and landing equipment, which provide for:

- movement of heavy cargoes (fittings on the floor);
- dropping light cargoes by parachute (cargo carriers and mechanisms);
- dropping heavy cargoes (roller conveyor tracks, cargo carriers, containers, etc.);
- evacuating wounded on stretchers (used mainly on the return trip and requires places for mounting stretchers and fastenings for them);
- moving men and parachute landing forces (seats, cables for hooking on the parachute rip cords, signal system).

Here is an example of how U.S. military transport aviation is used in the aggressive war in Vietnam. First of all, it serves as an aerial bridge between the United States and a place of bloody piracy. Military transport aviation helps to make numerous air movements not only from the United States to Southeast Asia, but also directly within the theater of military operations.

Within the theater, movements are made by two-engine piston aircraft designated the C-123 Provider. It has a maximum takeoff weight of around 30 tons, a speed of over 400 kilometers per hour, a maximum range of 7,600 kilometers, a useful load of up to $7\frac{1}{2}$ tons, and a crew of two. These aircraft need a strip of at least 360 meters for takeoff, and 280 meters for landing. Four squadrons of such aircraft move an average of 170,000 men and 24,000 tons of cargoes each month.



Loading heavy combat equipment into
an American military transport

The C-130 Hercules transports are also used intensively within Vietnam and all of Southeast Asia. Their takeoff weight is 60-70 tons, maximum useful load is 16-17 tons, cruising speed around 550 kilometers per hour. One of the modifications is the C-130E with a useful load of 12 tons and a range of 6,500 kilometers.

The American command moves troops and cargoes from the United States to Vietnam mainly with the C-141 Starlifter, which began to be used in 1965. This aircraft is an all-metal monoplane with a high-mounted sweptback wing. Its maximum takeoff weight is 144 tons, and has a length of over 44 meters with a crew of four. Maximum speed of this aircraft is 920 kilometers per hour, and its range with a load of 15 tons is 10,000 kilometers. The cargo compartment can hold 154 soldiers with personal weapons, two light tanks or armored personnel carriers with one artillery piece. Its maximum landing weight is 42 tons.

All military transport aircraft usually have a low floor. This aids in loading cargo directly from a vehicle. In addition, cargo gangways are used to load vehicles and combat equipment into the aircraft. These make up part of the weight of the empty aircraft, and therefore an attempt is made to situate them as low as possible and make them as short as possible.

The low floor and tail-loading of military transports led to creation of a high wing aircraft. The high wing with its fuel and power units are not subjected to such heavy damage when landing on dirt airfields and in emergency landings. Short takeoff and landing distances are obligatory for this type of aircraft. Special adaptations are used to meet this requirement, such as changing the wing configuration, use of acceleration devices for takeoffs, and drag chutes. The U.S. Air Force Center for Combat Utilization of Tactical Aviation has conducted tests of new equipment for air landing of cargoes from transport-landing aircraft.

In 1962 all transport-landing aircraft of the tactical air command were equipped with roller conveyors on which special platforms were mounted. These platforms were adapted for standard Army containers, and each was equipped with a large nylon parachute. Since the platforms were mounted on the roller conveyor in one row, much time was usually spent in dropping them, and this led to substantial scattering of cargoes over the terrain.

Now the aircraft cabin floor is equipped with a system of dual rails designed to drop platforms mounted in two rows in the cabin. Platforms and containers are dropped from aircraft with two chutes made of cotton, which are 75 percent cheaper than nylon chutes and allow cargoes weighing 700 kilograms with container to be dropped from a height of 120 meters.

According to the U.S. Air Force command, the new system of parachute landing of cargoes is being tested in the war in Vietnam.¹

An important characteristic of modern military transports is their exceptional stability and controllability at slow speeds. This takes into account the possibility that one or two engines could fail due to damage by enemy fire. Aircraft usually have landing gear with good cross-country ability for takeoffs from dirt strips.

A serious requirement is placed on mechanization of loading and unloading. This reflects on the turnaround time of aircraft. It is especially important to reduce the unloading time when moving troops in zones of combat activity, where the landing strip or air space may be under enemy fire. Another requirement is placed on military transport aviation: to make a takeoff and landing on unequipped field strips and even on water surfaces. These are the general requirements placed on modern military transport aircraft. Helicopters are utilized in addition to airplanes to move troops and cargoes. All foreign armies have taken account of the important role of helicopters in supporting troop mobility and maneuverability on the battlefield. Every year greater attention is given to development of helicopters and light army transport aviation.

However even greater prospects are evident in connection with experiments to create a design of a flying apparatus which would combine the qualities of a helicopter and an airplane, having great speed and stability in flight.

Rotorcraft, or air-cushion flying apparatus, have great importance for an army in achieving the mobility it must have in modern warfare, according to foreign military specialists. Further development of such flying apparatus, especially an increase in their load capacity, will eliminate the necessity of using a limited airfield network in wartime. What is more important, it will make possible the conduct of major air movements of troops in any theater of military operations where airfields and landing strips are lacking for the operation of conventional military transport means.

¹See Journal of the Armed Forces, January 1966, and Air Force, June 1966.

The experience of the war in Vietnam forced the American command to seek methods of landing men and materiel which would allow them to renounce flights of aircraft in close combat formations at low altitudes. Moreover, it is proposed to reduce the vulnerability of transport aircraft from ground fire of conventional small arms. The American aggressors have been forced to reckon with the increasing effectiveness of air defense means of the Vietnamese patriots.

Lately American aircraft have been forced to make landings singly or in groups of three or more aircraft. For a group airborne landing, the usual formation is a vee. Here, the second aircraft is to the rear and right of the leader at a distance of 600 meters, and the third one is to the left of the leader and behind the second aircraft at a distance of 650 meters. The interval between flight leaders is approximately 2½ kilometers. It is believed that this formation creates optimal conditions for dropping a landing force and allows for great maneuverability when moving from cruising approach altitude to the altitude for dropping cargoes (450 meters) or parachutists (370 meters) in a given region.

Such are some of the characteristics of modern air transport means, which allow the accomplishment of mass troop movements and landing of airborne forces over great distances, and which also support their maneuver on the battlefield.

A powerful reserve of our military transport aviation is the large number of aircraft of the Civil Air Fleet. Here is some information about these aircraft.

The heavy liner Tu-114, which is known in our country and abroad, has 170 seats. On short hauls, such as Moscow to Adler, it takes on 220 passengers with baggage. The usual speed of the Tu-114 with a load of 25 tons at a distance of 5,000 kilometers is over 850 kilometers per hour.

It is not superfluous to mention the excellent qualities of our medium transport aircraft, such as the An-12 and Il-18. The load capacity of the turboprop transport An-12 is over 14 tons, and in the tourist model it lifts 125 passengers and flies at a speed of 600 kilometers per hour.

The well-known test pilot V. Kokkinaki set several world records for carrying cargoes of 10, 15, and 20 tons at the maximum altitude in a series model Il-18. According to the magazine Grazhdanskaya aviatsiya (Civil Aviation) (No. 2, 1962), the modernized Il-18I, in comparison with the conventional series model Il-18, has its range of nonstop flight increased from 4,700 to 6,500 kilometers, the commercial load from 13,500 to 14,000 kilograms, and the number of passenger seats from 84 to 110-125. The distance from Moscow to Vladivostok has become possible to cover not only for the Tu-114, but also for the Il-18I. And of course, everyone still remembers the tremendous impression produced in the Paris air show of 1965 by our mighty An-22 -- the heavy transport designed by O. K. Antonov. The aircraft construction world has seen nothing compared to the "antey" /Soviet nickname

for the An-22⁷, which takes 80 tons of cargo on board. Its range with this load is 5,000 kilometers, and with a load of 45 tons it can fly 11,000 kilometers nonstop.



An-22 heavy transport

An unprecedented load -- over 100 tons -- was placed on the mighty shoulders of the "antey" at the end of October 1967. This load had not been lifted by any aircraft in the world. In one flight several world records for load capacity were broken, including that established by an American pilot in 1958. At that time the American succeeded in lifting a cargo of somewhat more than 53 tons to an altitude of 2,000 meters. The crew of the An-22 climbed to a ceiling of 7,848 meters with the maximum load! It can carry 700 passengers simultaneously.

And here are only the briefest figures for another aircraft which has been serially produced -- the Il-62 jet: speed -- 900 kilometers per hour, range of nonstop flight with 186 passengers -- 9,200 kilometers!

However life goes forward. New weapons and equipment are being improved or are being replaced by still newer models. There is no doubt that air transport means, too, which support mass movements of troops and combat equipment by air, will continuously improve and grow.

Airborne Landing Equipment

Special airborne landing equipment is needed for combat employment of modern landing forces with tactical or operational goals, in addition to having a sufficient number of military transport aircraft. Such equipment assures the secure landing of men, weapons, and various combat vehicles and cargoes in the enemy rear.

To this end use is commonly made of personnel and cargo chutes, various containers, packing materials, straps, nets, bags, fuel tanks, cargo platforms and suspensions, instruments for automatic opening, and other means.

Now for a bit of history. Modern personnel and cargo parachutes were created as a result of the long work of many scientists, engineers, and inventors. A parachute was first used to drop cargoes in World War I. At that time there appeared illuminating flares and shells, and somewhat later

came illuminating bombs as well. They had a small parachute which braked the descent of the illuminating body.

The first practical use of cargo chutes began here in the Soviet Union at the same time as the first employment of airborne landing forces in the thirties.

On the eve of the Great Patriotic War we conducted tests of a system of cargo chutes for dropping large combat equipment and heavy cargoes. However, significant success was not achieved in this field, chiefly due to limited capabilities of the TB-3 heavy bombers which had been adapted for landing personnel. As a result, airborne units who were well trained in a specialized and combat sense during World War II did not have means to combat enemy tanks and aviation after landing.

The very same thing occurred with landing of heavy cargoes by parachute during World War II in the armies of Germany, the United States, and England. Parachutists jumped with their personal weapons, one or two units of fire, and two or three days rations. Crew-served heavy weapons such as machine guns, mortars, and artillery pieces, were basically landed by gliders and only to a small extent by cargo chutes.

During World War II large cargo chutes and groups of parachutes, the so-called multicapopy parachute systems, were used to drop heavy cargoes. The British succeeded in dropping cargoes weighing up to 2½ tons on three chutes, the diameter of which was 15.5 meters. This method allowed them to drop Jeeps equipped with shock-absorbing frames. To make it easier to collect and sort cargoes and equipment after a mass drop, parachute canopies were introduced in different colors depending on the type of cargo. Containers were equipped with electric lights or luminescent strips. Containers were used with folding wheels, etc.

Nevertheless, the dropping of heavy cargoes by parachute was employed extremely rarely. Usually heavy weapons and cargoes were moved by glider, and cargo chutes and small packing containers were used to drop cargo of from 120-150 to 1,000 kilograms, as a rule.

World War II showed the almost absolute dependability of modern landing chutes. During the war the British alone produced 150,000 parachutes for airborne forces. They used nylon for the canopies more often than silk, and used cotton almost not at all. British and American parachute schools during the war made over 1 million jumps with what they viewed as an insignificant number of accidents: for example, the British school at Ringway had one accident per 17,000 jumps; the American school at Fort Benning had one per 10,000 jumps.

It is proper to note that the reliability of Soviet parachutes was considerably higher than foreign ones: during the Great Patriotic War one accident occurred in training per 35-40,000 jumps.

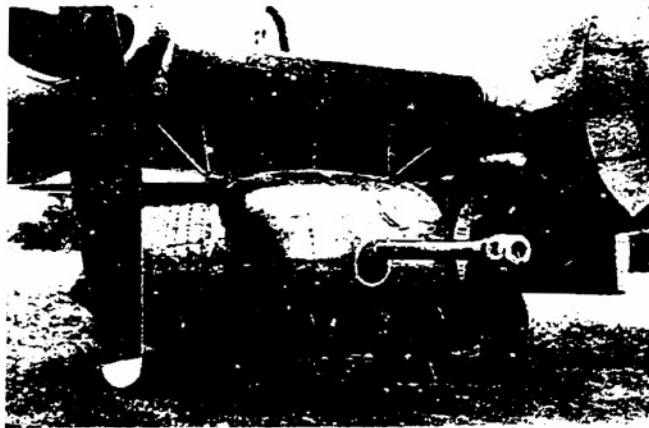


Parachutist in full array before a jump

In view of the fact that personnel chutes are calculated for a certain weight (100-120 kilograms), the parachutist's outfit was limited in weight or was placed in a container. Crew-served weapons and ammunition for them were usually dropped by cargo chutes separately from the parachutist. A deficiency of this method was that collection of the various containers after their landing was connected with a considerable loss of time, which was dangerous during critical moments, since the container rarely fell to earth near the parachute subunit for which it was destined.

The experience of World War II shows that surprise permits parachutists to attain initial success even with light weapons. But as soon as the element of surprise wears off, the situation radically changes and the landing force can hold their positions only if they have heavy weapons.

During the Great Patriotic War the Soviet Army carried out design work, and somewhat later instituted the mass output of airborne equipment allowing the use of cargo chutes for dropping heavy mortars, 57-mm and 85-mm artillery pieces, ASU-57 self-propelled landing guns, GAZ-67 vehicles from T-2 and Tu-4 bombers. For this they used open streamlined suspensions or streamlined, closed suspended containers. Both types were suspended under the fuselage of the aircraft or under its wings on the appropriate locked holders. The Tu-4 aircraft with two loaded containers weighing a total of around 10 tons had a flight radius in squadron formation of over 800 kilometers for purposes of a landing.



Tu-4 aircraft with P-90 parachute cabin containing ASU-57 self-propelled artillery piece

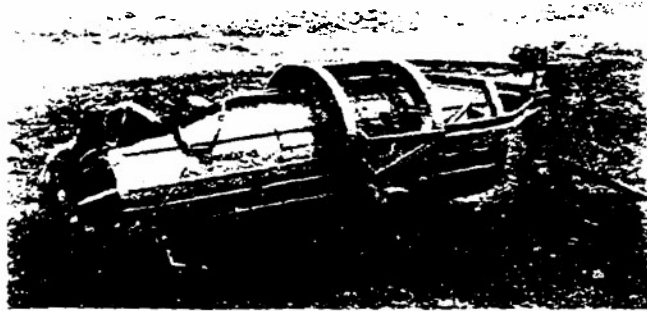
Bombers of the Il-28 type and others could also be used to drop cargoes. Special cargo containers shaped like aerial bombs and of the same size were hung from the bomb racks. Any bomber could lift as many of such containers as its load capacity would allow.

The main drawback of cargo chutes and containers used in the past and even at present is the fact that the weight of this equipment without counting the aircraft's landing equipment was 40-80 percent of the weight of the cargo being dropped. The average speed of descent of cargoes by parachute was 6 meters per second. Depending on the quality of fabric used, for cargoes to land with such speed required an average of around 0.9 square meters of material for each kilogram of weight dropped. For example, it required four cargo chutes, each with an area of 760 square meters, or over 3000 square meters of capron, to drop a cargo weighing 3,500 kilograms.

Even now a cargo with packing and container might weigh over 1,000 kilograms, and if mounted on a platform — up to 10 tons or more. An entire series of containers and packages is usually dropped from the tail section of a transport aircraft under the influence of the force of gravity or with the help of special auxiliary chutes or cargo carriers. Placement of cargoes on external suspensions by fastening them to bomb racks has almost completely disappeared from the practice of landing cargoes, since this sharply reflects on the aircraft's performance characteristics, makes piloting difficult, and what is more important, considerably reduces the range.

The most widespread method of dropping cargoes in the past and now is dropping large and heavy equipment (weapons, vehicles, etc.) in containers

(packages), using special cargo platforms. In both instances use is made of various cargo chutes and multicanopied parachute systems, and of shock-absorbing devices and instruments which provide for automatic opening and a safe landing.



Cargo parachute container for liquids

Cargoes in special crates and containers are placed on cargo carriers or roller conveyor tracks for the entire length of the aircraft cargo compartment.

Special equipment is required to drop cargo platforms with heavy weapons. In addition, much more time is needed for preparations than is the case for cargoes dropped in containers and crates.

Special platforms are employed to support the cargo and to absorb a part of the energy from the shock of hitting the ground. A vehicle, prime mover, self-propelled artillery piece, gun, or other weapon is mounted on the platform using the appropriate fastenings and with shock-absorbing devices under the platform. A cargo chute or multicanopied parachute system is installed on the platform and is drawn out of the aircraft by means of an auxiliary chute. The aircraft automatically uncouples when the stabilizing or main chute takes over.

Preparations for dropping heavy weapons, combat equipment, or cargoes are usually conducted near the airfields in sheltered spots, at a proper distance for atomic defense. The work of loading items of combat equipment onto parachute platforms and the installation of multicanopied systems is very laborious and painstaking. It depends on each small connection or instrument whether or not the cargo chutes will open.

To ensure that the cargo descending on the parachute does not smash up on hitting the ground, a specific speed of descent must be ensured, i.e. a specific amount of parachute and specific shock-absorbing devices must be chosen.

At present shock-absorbing devices are employed which vary both in design and in materials. Shock absorption using air has the greatest to offer. Occupying a small volume when folded up, large air balloons can be filled to absorb very great amounts of energy in the shock of landing, thus preserving the cargo descending at high speed on a parachute of limited size.

However a major deficiency exists with air shock absorption. High air balloons, when pressed between a cargo and the ground, tend to tip over the cargo in a high wind. Nevertheless, air shock absorption of parachute cargoes occupies an important place in airborne landing technology and permits a considerable reduction in size of chutes and a more rapid descent of cargoes.

In addition to the above, work is being carried on abroad in the field of improving packing and shock-absorbing materials with the aim of reducing cost and increasing the reliability of dropping cargoes by parachute. Prolonged tests of materials showed that the cellular paper shock-absorber had the best characteristics. Such devices are attached to the underside of the cargo, and on landing the force of the shock is absorbed by the cells as they are compressed. The advantages are obvious. For example, a small plywood platform with such shock-absorption could land 500 kilograms of cargo with a speed of descent of up to 15 meters per second on a parachute of a size 10 times less than would be required with the ordinary method of landing with rigid shock absorption. And this is not the limit. Specialists believe that the speed of descent of cargoes can be increased to 25 meters per second by using better shock absorption. This would considerably reduce cost and make it easier to drop cargoes by parachute. In addition, increasing the speed of descent permits achieving great precision in landing.

But there are more advanced methods for landing cargoes, such as the so-called soft landing using jet power.

By use of this device, one can land a cargo weighing 3-4 tons, using for this not the 3000 square meters of capron material needed for four cargo chutes, but only 500-600 square meters made into two comparatively small chutes. The cargo descends more rapidly than usual. Just above the ground this speed can be checked to almost nothing with the aid of an explosive device placed between the parachute and cargo. A powder charge is ignited electrically at the moment a special contact touches the ground. This contact, or closing device, is placed below the descending cargo. The powder gases are exhausted toward the ground by special nozzles in the lower part of the rocket engine, and thus brake the speed of descent.

Calculations show that the jet cargo chute system requires considerably less costly textile materials than are expended on conventional multicapny cargo chute systems. It is true that such devices have the drawback of using powder as a source of energy, which complicates the operating conditions in comparison with conventional devices.



Landing heavy cargoes by
use of a jet chute system

These are some of the characteristics of parachute landing means used to drop combat equipment and cargoes for airborne landing forces.

Parachutes, platforms, containers, and landing equipment on board transport aircraft have considerable weight, which reduces the airborne landing capabilities of the planes. All these means together are very costly and complex to operate. It takes too much time to prepare cargoes for a drop. Precision in a drop is still not sufficient. Just as for a bomber to be assured of a direct hit to destroy a bridge, so it is important for a transport aircraft to deliver and drop cargoes for restoration of the bridge right on the river bank, and not in the water or at some distance away. But in spite of these drawbacks, the present serially produced items used to land heavy equipment and cargoes permit them to be dropped from any altitude and almost in any weather precisely on a given point in complete safety and readiness to be placed immediately into operation. Weather, it should be said, is more of a hindrance for airborne parachutists.

Unfortunately, airborne troops still depend greatly on the weather. One could hardly make a paradrop at any time without taking account of the wind velocity near the ground.

A strong wind might prevent a parachute from collapsing after landing. With a sailing effect equal to its area, a parachute can inflict injuries on a parachutist by dragging him along the ground.

From a tactical point of view, conditions for a successful drop of parachute forces are determined by the following: drop as many parachutists

as possible in the shortest possible period of time on an area of minimum size at a point where the course of combat requires their participation. The altitude from which the jump is to be made is important, since this reflects on the exact accomplishment of the assignment.

In the course of the past war parachutists almost always jumped from low altitudes, since in jumping from a higher altitude they could be scattered over a considerable area and could moreover be under enemy fire for a longer time. The height of the jump was determined based on the fact that the descent from the point of separation from the aircraft to the ground had to last as long as necessary to arrest the free fall almost right before the very landing, and the parachutist had to touch down at a "safe" speed of approximately 4.5-5 meters per second.

The minimum safe altitude for existing parachutes with a stabilizing device is 250-300 meters.

Let us look with more detail at the problem of jumping from low altitudes.

An important advantage of a jump from a low altitude is the increase in precision and in safety of landing by men and cargoes.

Foreign specialists believe that a combat drop of men and cargoes should take place within a range of altitudes from 100 to 300 meters: light cargoes from a height of 100 meters; heavy cargoes from 150-300 meters, depending on the method of dropping them; and parachutists from a height up to 250 meters.

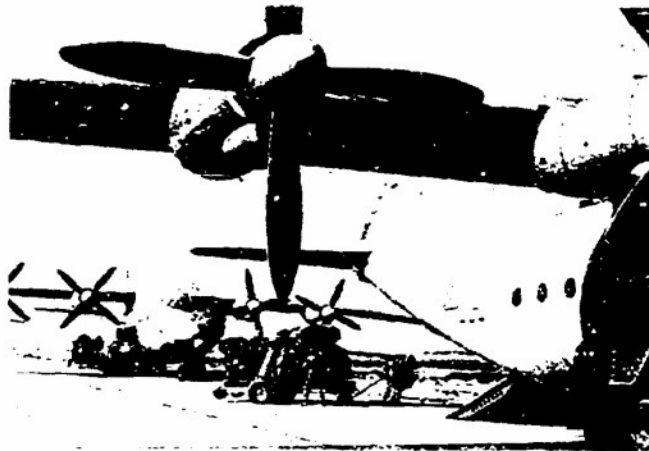
However they believe that dropping from low altitudes also has its disadvantages. The primary drawback is the increase in wear on the equipment of the aircraft and an increased expenditure of fuel, especially for turboprop and jet transports. This considerably reduces their radius of employment.

Difficulties also arise in piloting, and consequently in the tension of flight personnel, especially in case of a long flight at low altitudes. This considerably complicates navigation, since it depends on the terrain relief in zones monitored by enemy radars. The run on target is also complicated because of the difficulties in determining the drop zone from low altitudes. Here one must bear in mind that the effectiveness of on-board radio navigation equipment decreases up to 50 percent, depending on the terrain.

Naturally, a drop from low altitude involves a decrease in safety in case of a malfunction in parachute systems. A person will essentially be deprived of the possibility to make use of his reserve parachute, since neither time nor height remains for this.

In spite of all the advantages of jumping from low altitudes, it was not always effective due to terrain relief, heavy air defense at low and medium altitudes, and unfavorable weather conditions (the experience of the Germans at Stalingrad, of the French at Dien Bien Phu, and of the Americans in Korea and Vietnam).

Therefore, no matter what the advantages of jumping from low and medium altitudes, there remains a need to land cargoes and personnel from high altitudes. Of course, the lack of precision in landing cargoes increases as the drop height increases, but there are means to increase precision.



Loading heavy combat equipment to be dropped

As we know, wind deflection while descending on a parachute is one of the causes of scattering. Therefore we must reduce the deflection by limiting the height at which cargo chutes open. It must be the minimum height, which is determined by the time needed for the canopies to open and fill. The need arises for a special system which would regulate the time and moment of opening.

If cargoes make an irregular fall after leaving the fuselage, they will assume an arbitrary, indefinite position in the air. This will cause considerable change in the rate of descent of containers similar in shape and weight. Therefore, each cargo must be kept in a predetermined position and load the aircraft with containers similar in weight and geometric characteristics. Regulation of the position of a cargo during free fall is handled by a stabilizing chute. Stabilization is also necessary to ensure that the main cargo chutes are in the most convenient position for opening

at the proper time. The best position is in the upper part of the cargo being dropped. Moreover, the descent can be made to any given height on the small stabilizing chute. It also reduces the rate of free fall of the cargo.

Equipment used in dropping cargoes includes:

- the auxiliary chute, which pulls the cargo from the fuselage and activates the stabilizing chute or the main cargo chutes;

- the stabilizing chute, designed to limit the rate of descent, to stabilize the cargo in a certain position and until a certain altitude, and to ensure the normal activation of the main chutes;

- the cargo chutes, designed to provide a retarded descent of cargoes during the last part of the fall, and to land them with a speed of around 6 meters per second;

- instruments to delay the opening of stabilizing and cargo chutes, and also automatic uncoupling devices to separate the cargo from canopies after landing;

- cargo containers (platforms) for holding the cargo and for attachment of the multicanoied parachute system. Each container has standard sets of moorings and locks for fastening down various cargoes and combat equipment.

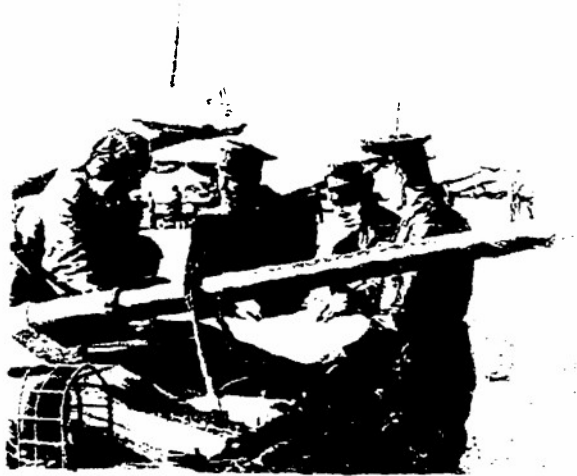
A special role is played by special devices designed to delay the opening of cargo chutes.

When these special devices (locks) operate, the auxiliary, stabilizing, and cargo chutes open in sequence at a certain altitude.

Development of remote pyrotechnical instruments began before development of instruments of other systems. Their general principle of operation is based on prolonged burning of powder. Depending on the length of the fuse and speed of burning, it is possible to ensure a delayed opening appropriate to a given drop altitude and chute opening altitude. After the fuse has burned, a powder charge is ignited and a lock (instrument) functions.

A degree of precision of around a second in remote instruments is considered satisfactory. The valuable qualities of these devices include simplicity in preparing them to function, mechanical stability, and the practically unlimited possibility for repeated use.

The main quality of foreign aneroid instruments is great precision in functioning — there is a ± 50 meter error. They are simple in construction and are quickly set. Their positive quality is that they cause the locks to function depending on the altitude and not on the actual time of free fall, as is the case with pyrotechnical instruments.



Clarifying the mission before leaving
for the "enemy rear"

Thus the drawback in dropping cargoes in past wars — lack of precision in landing, especially with limited visibility — has been considerably eliminated, and precision is ensured by a large complex of modern parachute equipment.

As early as the Great Patriotic War our transport aviation employed a method of dropping various cargoes without parachute to partisans, airborne troops, and other troops fighting in encirclement. In some cases this method of delivery was rather widespread. This provided for the container or crate of cargo to be dropped from the aircraft as it flew at slow speed and zero altitude over the drop zone. This method was successfully employed to deliver rations, clothing items, and some types of ammunition. Now the assortment of cargoes which can be dropped without parachutes has considerably expanded thanks to the development of chemistry. Special light rubber and capron packaging permit fuel and other items to be dropped from an aircraft in this manner. The container or crate can have light shock absorbers or stopping devices for use when dropped from a low altitude.

The nonparachute method of delivering cargoes from an aircraft to the ground is considered advantageous because it permits one to get by without using costly materials. At the same time, there is an increase in the useful load of the aircraft, since cumbersome and heavy landing packaging is not required.

These are some of the characteristics of air transport and airborne landing equipment. It can be said that the level of development achieved at present permits airborne troops to have the necessary means for conduct of combat operations and for ensuring mobility on the battlefield which, in combat characteristics, do not give way to the means available to ground forces.

The Paratroopers

Soviet airborne forces have not only modern air transport and airborne landing equipment, but well trained personnel as well. This was the basis for USSR Minister of Defense Mar SU R. Ya. Malinovskiy's statement before the 23rd CPSU Congress: "...Our airborne forces have grown considerably stronger. Over the last few years they have demonstrated good results in personnel combat training. In 1965 and the first months of 1966 the airborne troops made a half million jumps and dropped much heavy equipment and cargoes by parachute. Soviet paratroopers can appear in the enemy rear with everything they need, including medium tanks, in order to fight successfully. They are capable of accomplishing major strategic missions in modern warfare."¹

The events of the Great Patriotic War will never be erased from the people's memory. Many heroic deeds were accomplished by Soviet soldiers in those difficult years, and among them the airborne parachutists occupied a worthy place. Everywhere they fought the paratroopers enjoyed deserved combat authority and the respect of the other troops. Looking back at the combat record of the airborne forces, one can say that their motto "He who is bold in the air is bold and daring in combat," or "He who does not become confused in the air will not let you down in combat" was fully justified in the last war. Much credit for this belongs to parachute training, which develops in the paratrooper not only specific technical skills, but also willpower, resoluteness, and initiative.

However not every volunteer can carry out his dream of becoming a soldier of the "winged infantry." Some passionately wish to become parachutists, but health does not allow it. Others have excellent health, but they are not bold enough. It is quite understandable that he who wishes to jump into the air through a gaping hatch of an aircraft which is not always stable in flight, and thus become a parachutist, must have certain physical and high moral qualities.

Anyone can jump with a parachute when necessary to save his life, as for example in an emergency on an aircraft, but far from everyone would pick parachuting as his lifelong profession or favorite form of sport. Resolve and great willpower are the most important qualities in a parachutist.

The actual training of paratroopers and the combat experience of the past war show that physically fit persons and youths with strong willpower are good parachutist soldiers, and these qualities are inherent in our Soviet youth.

¹Krasnaya zvezda, 2 April 1966.

When a young soldier arrives in an airborne unit for the first time, he immediately meets experienced soldiers and sergeants who proudly wear the parachute insignia and emblems of the airborne forces. The young soldier is made familiar with the combat traditions of paratroopers and the combat history of the unit in which he will performing strenuous but honorable service. He dreams proudly of how he can most quickly receive the honor of wearing this insignia and these emblems, which are symbols not only of the history and combat record of the airborne forces, but also symbols of the trials, difficulties, dangers, and risk which the paratroopers experienced during the Great Patriotic War and which they are ready to undergo again in the future if the interests of their Motherland require it.

Therefore with his very first Army steps, the future parachutist and soldier is imbued with a deep respect for his military specialty and considers it an honor to be in the ranks of the Guards "winged infantry."

He will also quickly come to love and take pride in his immediate tutors — the officers and sergeants. Their military task is not easy — what responsibility they bear on their shoulders! How much energy and health the parachute training takes! The heart of an officer is never quiet. He is concerned for the men when he is with them in the aircraft. He is just as concerned when he stands in the drop zone and observes the parachutes opening. Any hitch in a canopy filling with air, or a free fall longer than planned, and his heart begins to beat faster.



Soon the heavy airship will take off with the paratroopers

Many persons will undoubtedly be found who wish to jump with a parachute as a test of their will and to become familiar with the sensations connected with free fall from a great height. But fewer will wish to repeat this jump. And there are not very many who will fall in love with parachute jumping and remain dedicated to it all their lives.

This is why airborne officers enjoy deserved authority in the Soviet Army. They are men of great willpower, robust health, and high moral qualities. Airborne matters are their military specialty.

What kind of patriotic paratrooper must one be to constantly share the risk and danger of one's lifetime profession to the same degree as a young soldier, regardless of age? The officer and soldier sit side by side in the aircraft and approach the open hatch for the jump pressed closely together, feeling the hot breath and accelerated beating of the heart.

This unity of paratroopers in the air remains inviolable also in combat after landing in the enemy rear. This is why airborne units are distinguished by an exceptionally high degree of cohesiveness, solidity, and unity. The soldiers, sergeants, and officers are united into a strong combat family not only by the parachute, before which all are equal, but also by similar conditions of the field and combat. In addition, in spite of these similar conditions of combat parachute life and peacetime training, one never observes in the airborne forces examples of familiarity or disrespect to a senior or one's commander. "Friendship must not interfere," is the iron law.

It is without doubt that the particular features of the service of a parachute officer leave an indelible imprint on the life of his family as well. Parachute patriotism and the spirit of landing forces permeates literally both young and old. In conversations between children and adults some parachute detail sometimes slips in. A person who is not familiar with airborne affairs and who visits the family of a parachutist for the first time will be forced to listen to endless tales of flights and jumps, of airplanes and parachutes.

The children of officers know many of the rules for making parachute jumps and the commands of parachutists. They quickly "acquire" all training leftovers in the parachute training area and visit the facility with greater enthusiasm than their children's playground.

Experienced parachutists consider their specialty risky, but for a real paratrooper there is no greater punishment than being restricted from jumping. No matter how many jumps he has made, it is always too few, and he always complains that he is allowed to jump too little. An airborne trooper considers the one who wears the parachutist's emblem and who loves the parachute as a true friend.

If a youth who is weak in spirit and will comes into such a group of bold and courageous men, who are proud that they serve in the Guards airborne forces, then he will definitely come to believe in himself and his strength under the influence of the situation and these remarkable people. There can be no other result. The young soldier will quickly understand that he must consider it an honor to be part of the "winged infantry," which is always obliged to be ready to deliver the first blow against the enemy in his most sensitive spot, where airborne troops are least expected.

The young soldier who has become a parachutist can no longer be the same as he was before coming into the Army. Parachuting catches him up and penetrates into all aspects of his everyday life and training.



Subunits move to the departure airfield

In the training of parachutists a large part is played by the officers of the parachute landing service, who are the most strict and demanding, but who are always respected by the airborne troops as educators and as parachutists. Physically fit and usually with great experience and knowledge in parachuting, they direct the entire ground and air training of the airborne trooper.

The basic requirement in methods of training soldiers of all specialties — to preserve a sequence in the conduct of classes, to go from the simple to the complex — is also inherent to and obligatory for training parachutists. Training is inseparable from education. This is a unified process in training the airborne trooper.

To jump with a parachute is to display daring, courage, willpower, and skill. A jump is essentially an entire complex of psychological experiences, a struggle with oneself and with the instinct of self-preservation which appears in a person. For a soldier who is just beginning to prepare himself to jump with a parachute, everything seems unknown, new, unusual, and doubtful. There is a deep meditation, a lack of trust in oneself and in one's ability to overcome fear independently at the moment of leaving the aircraft. There is also sometimes a lack of trust in faultless operation of parachute equipment and in a good outcome to the jump.

Because of this it is very important to surround the young soldiers who are future parachutists with the attention and concern of experienced airborne troopers. There is no place here for frightening tales of "the

terrible" parachute jumps. Unfortunately there are still those who are not beyond gathering the youths around them in their free time and who boast of airborne daring.

It is without doubt that meetings and talks with experienced airborne troopers, masters of parachute sport, and officer instructors of parachute training have a great educational significance for the young parachutist in his struggle against the fear of heights, against the fear of leaving the aircraft and of a free fall. But more than talks are necessary. Special demonstration jumps are arranged for the future airborne troopers in which various tasks are accomplished — automatic opening, stabilized fall, and delayed opening of the chute. Without doubt, it is also useful to show the work of sport parachutists in the air. There are many in each unit. They can make different kinds of jumps, for example, for precision landings, combined jumps, and acrobatic jumps. This concludes with a demonstration of jumps by a subunit of experienced personnel, including the accomplishment of a brief tactical problem.

Thus a skilled explanation along with a practical demonstration of the work of parachutists in the air gradually dispels doubt and fear. There appears a confidence in the favorable outcome of a jump and there is affirmation of the personal conviction that "I'm not really worse than others." It is without doubt that the entire tenor of Army life, precise accomplishment of the order of the day, classes in the field in any weather, day or night, and daily persistence in overcoming all difficulties of field and combat life also aid in the instilling of daring, resolve, and volitional qualities. These are the very goals of physical training and mass sport work (in addition to its basic task of general physical development of the soldier), and the use of special sport and parachute training gear.

Here it is very important to have an individual approach to the man. One fears heights, another the landing, a third cannot assume a stable attitude when leaving the aircraft, and yet another is afraid of literally everything. This means that those exercises must be chosen which will suit a particular person to the greatest degree in accordance with his deficiencies.

The majority of replacements in the airborne forces have already made several familiarizing jumps. In spite of this, the first jump under Army conditions remains for the young soldier a serious test of all his moral and physical forces, and a practical and very rigid check of the knowledge and skills he has acquired. This circumstance obligates all officers to be very attentive to each young soldier while he packs his chute, in prejump training, and on the eve of the jump, when he should create a quiet, friendly situation, admonishing the young men with a warm word and warm advice.

While engaging in the technical side of a jump in classes, one must not forget the moral and psychological training of an airborne trooper. In this regard the personal example of an officer and a sergeant has decisive significance. As in any other matter, there must not be stereotypy here — there must be knowledge, inventiveness, and initiative. There is no room for indulgence or simplification in training. One must remember that if

something is overlooked on the ground, it will be difficult or even impossible to correct it in the air. However coarseness must not be substituted for exactingness. The error or negligence of a soldier must not be made the object of sharp, insulting, or mocking shouts or namecalling which are an insult to human dignity.

An individual approach is needed even in placing troopers in the aircraft. There was a case in one unit when five men did not jump from one of the transports. Why? It turned out that all five were young soldiers. Two of them were very much afraid to jump, tried to cling together, and went to the airfield very reluctantly.

In this instance the senior man, who had not studied the composition and the individual qualities of the young parachutists, placed them together. The first of them was frightened by the roar of the engines rushing in through the open hatch. At the command "Go" he took several steps forward and fell down. His comrade fell on top of him and the path of the three behind them was blocked. If this group of five had been placed in the aircraft between experienced airborne troopers and the weaker ones were nearer the hatch, then none would have remained in the plane. Of course, the development of volitional qualities does not end with the first jump from an aircraft. It continues throughout the service of the paratrooper.

There is no question that the commander who states that a parachutist risks nothing and that a jump is absolutely safe in any conditions is not acting properly. The safety of jumps is ensured by thorough and comprehensive ground preparation, a high state of discipline, and exactingness of the parachutists to themselves. All facts indicate that precise observance of the safety rules in making jumps precludes all cases of injury or death. Only if the body is in a completely incorrect position at the moment of leaving the aircraft can one receive an injury or interfere in the normal operation of the parachute.

Injuries are usually very rare after leaving the aircraft, although this moment is the most dangerous and tense point of the jump. The overload experienced by the parachutists at this time reaches considerable proportions.

However the jump does not end with the opening of the chute. During his descent, the parachutist must not relax his attention. His comrades are descending ahead of and behind him, and he must get away from another parachutist in good time so as to be able to warn him if the threat arises of falling into each other's shrouds or onto the canopy. And of course, if a comrade gets into trouble, he must immediately be given any possible assistance. Dozens of paratroopers have been awarded orders and medals of the Soviet Union in postwar years for heroic actions in the air and for excellent mastery of combat parachute technology.

In addition, during the descent the paratrooper must utilize many different techniques such as firing from the air against ground targets,

jumping into water, and jumping with nuclear and chemical monitoring devices or means of protection. Thus the parachutist approaches the ground in constant tension from the moment of separation from the aircraft.

At a height of 100-150 meters the parachutist must turn with the wind drift and land in this position, overcoming the natural desire to spread his legs apart. Much skill and training is required to avoid bruises and injuries. From the very first day of service, the paratrooper learns that the success of his further actions on the ground depends on a skillful landing.

As we know, not only men, but also combat equipment, heavy weapons, ammunition, etc., are needed to conduct combat operations in the enemy rear. Therefore an important section of parachute training is teaching the crews of guns and mortars, self-propelled artillery pieces and radios, and the drivers of vehicles and prime movers to prepare their equipment for the drop with the use of special multicanopied cargo parachute systems, platforms, and containers.

If each paratrooper "works for himself" in making jumps, it is the group, team, or crew which acts in training for landing heavy airborne equipment. The safe landing of a gun, self-propelled artillery piece, or mortar, and their participation in accomplishing the combat mission depend on the skilled and coordinated actions of this group. Damage to a gun in the air or on landing puts not just one man, but an entire crew, out of action.

This is why all paratroopers must not only know how to prepare themselves for a jump, but must know and carry out all techniques and rules of preparing their heavy equipment for the drop. All of them, and above all the officers and sergeants, must thoroughly know how to moor it to the cargo platforms, how to mount units of cargo parachutes onto the platforms, how to load equipment into the aircraft, and how to quickly unhook it and prepare it for combat after landing.

All this is achieved by continuous practical training in the parachute training facility with the use of combat training equipment and mock-ups. Here one must have an inquisitive and imaginative nature, so as not only to precisely fulfill all rules of operating with the airborne equipment, but also to reduce to a maximum the periods of preparing it for landing.

The actions of the parachutist, and consequently his training, undoubtedly have their peculiar features in comparison with the training of soldiers of other combat arms. While the infantryman, tanker, combat engineer, and artilleryman gradually close with the enemy and gradually grow into combat events and become accustomed to them, the airborne paratrooper comes from the relatively calm deep rear and in a very short time falls into the heat of battle, into a situation which would seem hopeless to others, but which for the paratroopers is a normal way of conducting combat operations in the enemy rear. Therefore the paratrooper must not only simply be a brave and resolute soldier. He often has to operate alone as part of a small group under conditions where the success of the subunit's combat mission sometimes depends on his quickness of wit, on his initiative, and on

his ability to quickly orient himself on unfamiliar terrain and make independent decisions. An old Russian proverb with a new content is applicable to the Soviet paratrooper: "The soldier is alone in the field!"

Moreover, the difficult conditions of fighting in the enemy rear demand of the airborne paratrooper great physical endurance and continual readiness for active combat under any conditions of terrain or time of year. During operations in the Great Patriotic War the paratroopers always appeared where least expected and successfully accomplished their missions. They operated in the deep snow and low temperatures of winter, and in spring and summer made crossings of forested and swampy terrain, up to their waists in water or by swimming.



Parachutists on parade in Moscow (1967)

It frequently happens that the paratrooper must operate silently in order to achieve surprise and take advantage of all the benefits of darkness. In this case silent weapons are a formidable means for him.

He must also have a good command of the techniques of disarming an enemy, of the actions of an unarmed person against one who is armed, and of the use of enemy weapons. If necessary, he must be able to use the latter as well as his own. The paratrooper must be particularly alert in the enemy rear and take all safety precautions, otherwise the slightest inadvertence may harm the entire landing force.

The excellent combat training of the paratrooper must instill in each man the ability to make decisions, operate quickly and independently, and to easily endure all hardships of field and combat life in operations in the enemy rear.

Paratroopers always enter battle after landing in an unknown situation, usually operating against superior enemy forces. In these circumstances a paratrooper's best friend is his initiative, inventiveness, and

boldness. The main thing for which paratroopers must strive is to lead the enemy astray, employing the most varied techniques of deception for this very purpose.

It would be incorrect to assume that after landing in the enemy rear the parachutists' actions lose their specific peculiarities and that everything which takes place thereafter has the character of conventional infantry combat, waged according to more or less firm, prescribed rules. Even after landing, the combat of paratroopers retains its special features. In distinction to conventional combat, combat in the enemy rear is characterized mainly by the following: the need to conduct reconnaissance and observation to all sides; vagueness of the situation; a deficiency in heavy weapons and heavy transport for maneuver purposes; and a limited amount of ammunition.

The old assertion that the basis of offense is a combination of fire and movement when an airborne force conducts combat operations is not always true and is losing its significance. The main thing for the paratrooper is swiftness of the attack. The neutralizing and paralyzing effect of fire is not as effective as the astounding surprise, well thought-out procedures, and swift force of movement which characterize the attack of an airborne landing force.

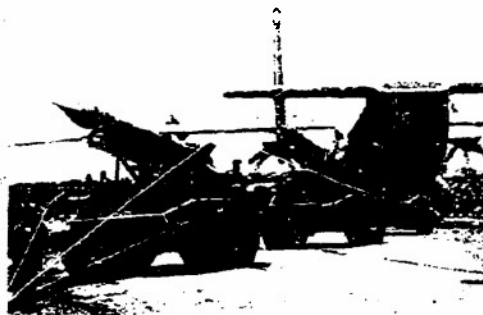
The instilling in each paratrooper of true combat brotherhood and high morale has great importance for successful operations in the enemy rear. The secret of success of paratroopers in the last war lay not only in special airborne training and depended not only on some special equipment or particular methods of tactical training. If the Soviet parachutists won the authority and respect of soldiers of other combat arms, they did so because of their exceptionally high morale and supreme devotion to the Communist Party and Soviet Motherland.

This was a special combat brotherhood, which connected all parachutists regardless of rank or position with the bonds of friendship and created a monolithic, unified military collective. This was acknowledgement of the fact that the high title of Soviet parachutist, the airborne uniform and insignia which each member of this collective bore, obligated him to fearless exploits in ground combat as well.

Mutual trust and help were the basis for such a remarkable unity, which was displayed most strongly in the airborne units and large units which took part in the last war. One comrade trusted another and knew that he would not be let down in a time of need. A soldier trusted in his officer and his commander, and knew that in case of need they would do everything possible for him. It was the fierce fighting of airborne forces in the enemy rear that determined the qualities of airborne officers, who were able to firmly rally their subunits and instill in their subordinates a deep love for their combat arm.

The relationship between an officer and a soldier in the airborne forces was determined by the fact that during the landing the officer

experienced great stress, suffered deprivation, was subjected to dangers, and bore a physical and moral load just like any ordinary parachutist. The same emotional experiences, the same danger, the same risk, and even the same food connected the ordinary parachutist and his officer with the bonds of brotherhood and mutual respect.



Air holiday in Moscow on 9 July 1967. Unloading self-propelled missile launchers from an An-22

It is this inner cohesion in combination with a high state of personnel training that distinguished the Soviet airborne forces from the other combat arms and raised them to heroic exploits not only in combat, but, just as important, also in the hard life in the enemy rear, which was full of deprivations.

It is very important to preserve and develop this combat spirit and tradition of our airborne forces and their constant combat readiness to come at any moment to the defense of the state interests of our Motherland. These qualities were always inherent in the Soviet paratroopers. It is important that they be preserved and perfected in the future as well:

Even now in peacetime the paratroopers perform deeds which summon the admiration and recognition of Soviet citizens. The paratroopers carry out their obligations in a self-sacrificing and courageous manner while perfecting their combat mastery and alertly protecting the creative labor of their people along with all soldiers of the Soviet Army. With their faultless service they enrich the grand combat traditions of the airborne forces.

The daily life of the paratroopers is full of vivid examples of nobleness and courage. They do not fear danger, and are ready in any kind of trouble to help out their comrades and carry out the most difficult missions.

In tactical exercises involving an airborne landing and during training jumps they display steadfastness, bravery, and the ability to overcome difficulties and not lose their heads in a difficult situation.

The combat training of paratroopers sometimes takes place under exceptionally acute and tense circumstances. But they know that their service does not tolerate oversimplification or conventionalities. They also know that they must be ready at any time, no matter where they are — in the air or on the ground — to help a comrade, even if it means risking their own lives. The spiritual simplicity, nobleness, responsiveness, and genuine humanism of the Soviet soldier are clearly revealed in each such deed.

* * *

The combat traditions of the airborne forces, which were formed and strengthened in the numerous battles for the honor, freedom, and independence of the Motherland, are inseparable from the combat traditions of the Soviet Army and from the revolutionary traditions of the working class and our Communist Party. The exploits of heroes in the name of their homeland have been imprinted forever in the people's memory. Mikhail Vasil'yevich Frunze said that one can consider the task of education completed only when each soldier has been imbued with a feeling of love for his unit, and through it for the entire Army, when he will be proud of belonging to it, and when he is happy over its successes and disappointed in its failures.¹

In educating paratroopers in the combat traditions of the airborne forces, officers are always obliged to stress that the exploits of the front-line soldiers are evidence of their deep awareness of their duty to the Motherland, of their excellent knowledge of the combat equipment and weapons, and of their high state of combat mastery and discipline. Tales of the famous deeds of countrymen mobilize the paratroopers for zealous service. The young soldiers are permeated with a feeling of concern for the honor of their subunit, regiment, and division, and for preserving and enriching their combat traditions.

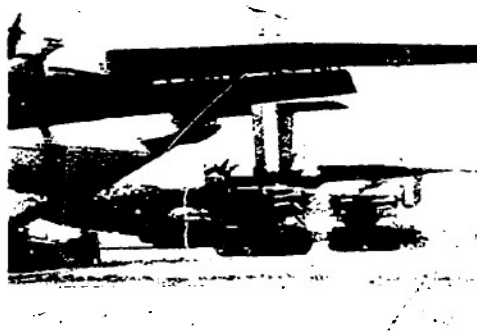
The combat traditions of the airborne forces are a mighty means of educating paratroopers. They inspire them to new successes in military work. Therefore nothing must be forgotten that is connected with the Great Patriotic War. The history of the past war aids in forming the will of our youth, which must learn to love their excellent Motherland just as it was loved by the soldiers, officers, partisans, and those who continuously labored for the sake of victory in the plants and in the fields during the Great Patriotic War.

The foreign policy of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government is directed toward relieving international tension in all possible ways. At the same time, our Party and Government always remember that imperialists throughout the world, and especially the United States, are doing everything they can to aggravate the international situation and are nurturing wild plans of attacking the socialist states.

However the peoples of the Soviet Union and of countries of the socialist camp are displaying the greatest vigilance in regard to the intrigues

¹See M. V. Frunze, Izbrannyye proizvedeniya (Selected Works), V. II, Moscow, Military Publishing House, 1957, p. 297.

of the imperialists. They are strengthening the might and defenses of the whole socialist camp in every way possible, and are taking the necessary steps to ensure the safety of peoples and the preservation of peace. The Guards airborne forces, who are always ready to make a landing where the Motherland directs, stand together with all the Soviet Army on guard of peace and the state interests of the Soviet Union.



Air holiday in Moscow on 9 July 1967. Unloading
missile complexes from an An-22

The strength and power of the airborne forces was convincingly demonstrated on 9 July 1967, during an air parade in Moscow dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet state. This air parade was an inspiring demonstration of the remarkable achievements of Soviet aircraft construction. It was a vivid display of the high state of mastery of our aviators and paratroopers, who handle modern technology to perfection.

The immense Moscow sky saw the fly-by of jets, supersonic aircraft, and missile-firing combat aviation -- the formidable winged force of our Motherland, created by the Soviet people under the direction of the Communist Party.

Aircraft of civil aviation were demonstrated. The well-known liners Tu-104, Tu-114, Il-18, An-10, An-24, and Tu-124 flew by one after another at low altitude. Right after them there appeared the new jet passenger aircraft Yak-40 and Tu-134, and the new intercontinental jet passenger Il-62s brought up the rear of the column of Civil Air Fleet aircraft. Civil aviation is a powerful reserve of military transport aviation of the Soviet Armed Forces.

A unique airborne operation was brilliantly conducted at the airfield in Domodedovo. A column of An-12 military transports dropped over a thousand

airborne paratroopers in minutes on an extremely limited drop zone. Two groups of Mi-4 and Mi-6 helicopters landed antiaircraft and antitank guns, self-propelled artillery pieces, and prime movers on the airfield captured by the paratroopers. An-12 aircraft with heavy self-propelled guns landed right after the helicopters. An-22 aircraft, the largest heavy airships in the world, completed the airlanding by delivering surface-to-air and surface-to-surface missile complexes to the paratroopers.



Air holiday in Moscow on 9 July 1967.
After unloading, self-propelled artillery moves out to the assembly area

Unfortunately the small drop zone did not allow for a drop of heavy combat equipment. Everything brought by the helicopters and aircraft except for the missile complexes could have been delivered by parachute to the landing force. However we know that military transport aviation is capable of moving troops, various combat equipment including guns, tanks, ballistic missiles, etc., for long distances by air. The landing was constantly covered by supersonic fighters, echeloned by height.

Our airborne forces are strong with their winged fighters, who have remarkable moral and combat qualities. Our airborne parachutists are men who are ideologically hardened and devoted to the end to their people and to their native Communist Party. No matter what the situation the paratroopers may be in while carrying out training missions, they invariably demonstrate a high state of training and display staunchness and courage.

The paratroopers, like all Soviet soldiers, have mastered all the latest methods of fighting in modern combat, and can handle the most modern and formidable weapons. In the present aggravated international situation their new successes in military work answer the Party's call to persistently master combat equipment and weapons, preserve and enrich the revolutionary and combat traditions of the Soviet people, and vigilantly and reliably guard the sacred conquests of the Great October Revolution.

The air parade showed that the Air Forces and the Airborne Forces, which are an integral part of the Soviet Army and Navy, are at the proper level of outfitting and personnel training, and are ready to stand shoulder to shoulder with the other branches of the Armed Forces in accomplishing the most complex missions of reliably defending the sacred borders of the Motherland from the schemes of any aggressor.

* * *

The Soviet airborne forces successfully demonstrated their combat capabilities to the fullest two months after the air parade, in Exercise Dnieper.

This large fall exercise by the Soviet Armed Forces was held on the threshold of the holiday of all progressive mankind — the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

With their actions on the training fields, the Soviet soldiers gave notice to the Party, the Soviet Government, and the Motherland about their successes in combat and political training, and about their readiness to defend the achievements of the Great October Revolution.

Exercise Dnieper, which took place on the territory of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, involved the participation of large units of airborne forces and military transport aviation, in addition to troops of the Byelorussian, Carpathian, and other military districts.

It was the evaluation of the Exercise Director, USSR Minister of Defense Marshal A. A. Grechko, that personnel of the Armed Forces and of all the combat arms displayed a high degree of combat ability, boldness and resolve in the attack, and stubbornness in the defense. Officers and generals showed the high state of mastery in organization and conduct of battles and operations demanded by present-day conditions.

The actions by soldiers, sergeants, and officers of the airborne forces in the exercise were beyond all praise.

This is the evaluation of the paratroopers' actions by a group of military correspondents of Krasnaya zvezda in the article "'Dnieper' — Force in Movement."

"We still recall the strikes delivered by the paratroopers. It can be said with assurance that they fell on the enemy like snow. Their actions were distinguished not only in size, but by the originality of the concept and its execution. This is particularly true of the force landed at the very height of the battle for the Dnieper, in the tactical depth of the enemy's defenses. The defense of the "West forces" was quickly broken. In essence, this was affirmation of a new method of crossing water barriers — by air."¹

¹Krasnaya zvezda, 4 October 1967.

One could dispute the authors of the article as to when and where this method of crossing water barriers was first employed, but one thing is certain — on 24 September 1943, almost a quarter of a century ago, the 3rd and 5th airborne brigades of the Soviet airborne forces attempted to capture a base of operations on the right bank of the Dnieper. Although in 1943 this method of crossing was first revealed as "vertical envelopment" across a major water obstacle, it received full confirmation in 1967 under new technical conditions.

In the latter half of the day on 25 September, the "East force" command made the decision to land a major airborne force composed of a reinforced airborne large unit in the operational depth of defense of the "West force." Before the landing, units of bomber aviation delivered a powerful blow against enemy artillery batteries.

The move of units of the airborne large unit to airfields in the marshalling area was given reliable cover by the attackers' fighter aviation. Flying at supersonic speeds, the fighters cleared the sky along the routes of the airborne force, destroying "West" aircraft which attempted to attack units of military transport aviation.

After the fighters came the fighter-bombers, which neutralized the enemy air defense means.

Finally the heavy air transports appeared over the objective areas. First to leave the aircraft were paratroopers of the advance detachment and landing support elements. While still in the air, they opened up accurate automatic weapons fire against ground targets, thus clearing for themselves a place to land. The paratroopers threw off their parachute harness and immediately began carrying out their special tasks. Calculated minutes went by. A new group of heavy aircraft appeared over the landing areas.

Armored personnel carriers, self-propelled guns, and containers with ammunition and equipment fell to earth under the enormous canopies of cargo chutes. They descended almost vertically and at a rapid rate. When only a few meters from the ground, bright flashes burst from the lines to which the equipment was attached. Right after this came deafening explosions: these were the special devices going off. The blast wave braked the descent, and the equipment made a soft landing. Meanwhile, combat clashes were continuous in the sky over the landing area. Fighters of both sides were involved — one side trying to hold, the other trying to win air superiority.

The howitzers, antitank and antiaircraft guns, mortars, and prime movers had not yet fully landed when the main body of the parachute force fell on the control point of a major grouping of "West" forces and on its positions.

It seemed that the columns of military transports covered the entire sky and the horizon. At almost the same time, thousands of white dots blossomed. After five seconds of fall, they turned into large parachute canopies

and soldiers falling smoothly to earth. The ground was covered by thousands of snow-white parachutes.

First to land were the large unit commander and his staff. It took only a few minutes for the many thousands of parachutists to land. The paratroopers quickly assumed their combat formations, took their places in armored personnel carriers, self-propelled artillery pieces, and motor vehicles, and immediately began carrying out assigned combat missions.

Aerial combat was building up in intensity over the area of combat operations of the landing force. Both sides committed more and more units. Some were striving to support the paratroopers, others were trying to hold up their advance.

The combat of an airborne force in the depth of enemy defense is complex. The force is always faced with the threat of falling into an encirclement. This is why the operations of the "winged infantry" are distinguished by their swiftness, offensive passion, and desire to attack the enemy from the move.

Izvestiya provided a high estimate of the actions of the airborne troops.

"It must be said that the paratroopers are soldiers of unlimited courage and bravery. They never lose their heads, and always find a way out. The paratroopers have mastered the different modern weapons to perfection and handle them with artistic skill. Each fighter of the winged infantry is able to carry on a fight at odds of one against a hundred.

In the days spent at the exercise we had occasion to see many skilled actions, not only by individual soldiers and officers, but by entire subunits, large units, and staffs. We were witnesses to the art of employing combat equipment under the most difficult combat conditions. But probably the strongest impression was of the airborne forces, commanded by Col Gen V. Margelov, and the airmen of military transport aviation, commanded by Mar Avn N. Skripko. Their soldiers demonstrated the intricate landing equipment, a high state of training, and such daring and initiative that one can say with assurance about them... that they are worthy of continuing and enriching the combat renown of their fathers and older brothers -- paratroopers of the Great Patriotic War. The baton of bravery and valor is in reliable hands."¹

The airborne unit landed in the "West" rear on helicopters operated no less successfully. Its subunits carried out the difficult mission of capturing and holding a base of operations on the right bank of the Dnieper, which was held by the enemy, until the arrival of attacking troops.

¹Izvestiya, 28 September 1967.

Covered by the low clouds, the helicopters suddenly landed not only men, but self-propelled guns as well. The subunits quickly prepared for the attack. This time the soldiers had to perform field firing as part of a reinforced battalion. Targets were used to designate the enemy. They were scattered across a large field and were well camouflaged. The nature of the targets indicated that the enemy possessed the most up-to-date means of combat. One had to have a high state of combat skill and expert knowledge of one's weapon in order to defeat him.

The paratroopers opened up a powerful barrage, supported by subunits of artillery and rockets. The rumble of artillery pieces burst over the field. The targets fell flat. Panels flew into bits and pieces. The fire avalanche destroyed everything in its path. Paratroopers displayed their high state of firing skill and the ability to accurately destroy targets using all types of small arms fire. The excellent result was that 98 percent of the targets were hit!

An inspection of the troops who participated was held at the end of Exercise Dnieper. The "winged infantry" appeared before the tribune mounted on light vehicles, and above it combat aircraft flew by in squadrons. It was as if they were escorting their closest combat friends -- the airborne paratroopers.

In green coveralls decorated with airborne emblems and blue shoulder boards, in flight helmets, armed with submachine guns, machine guns, and grenade launchers, the parachutists passed by for inspection, looking as if they had been hand-picked.

Many officers, sergeants, and ordinary parachutists were singled out by the Minister of Defense for having excelled. According to his estimate, the paratroopers in Exercise Dnieper demonstrated courage, organization, and a high state of training. Their commanders skillfully controlled subordinates under the most difficult combat conditions, including combat in encirclement. They successfully handled a large number of the most difficult missions of capturing and holding bases of operations and destroying important objectives in the enemy rear.

The actions of the airborne landing forces, including those airlanded by helicopter, have become a widespread phenomenon in the Soviet Army. They fully meet the operational and tactical views of conducting modern offensive combat.

Exercise Dnieper clearly demonstrated the might of the Soviet Armed Forces, which was achieved for the glorious Fiftieth Anniversary of the Great October Revolution.

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